A multi-generational oral history study considering English collective memory of the Second World War and Holocaust.

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Abstract

This thesis provides a survey of the English memory of the Second World War and Holocaust using oral interviews. Drawing from work by Halbwachs on collective memory and Grele on myth-making I demonstrate how people use national collective memory to provide frameworks for their individual narratives of memory or remembrance. I will also show how various influences from media and education have contributed to promoting and sustaining some of the myths associated with the British experience of the Second World War. However, by an empirical analysis of the data I also demonstrate how different groups within the nation, especially the family setting, have emotional charged memories that differ markedly from the national collective memory. Therefore, the study also notes remarkable divergences in the ‘public’ and ‘private’ representation of World War II and the Holocaust within England. I will illustrate how certain memories and representations have been marginalised as they are not useful to the overall social cohesion of the national community, which draws a level of security from the popular British war memory. Therefore this study adds a contribution to the discourse surrounding the memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust within England.
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The last words go to my parents, James and Tracey.
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PART 1

Introduction

Britain, World War II and a New Oral History Approach

The Second World War still maintains a huge significance in Britain’s history.¹ The majority of people have not only heard of it but have knowledge of at least some of the events that occurred during 1939-45. In recent years this commemoration and interest has increased rather than decreased as the number of people who can actually remember this period begins to decline. The fiftieth anniversary of VE-Day was marked by a two minute silence more widely observed than any since the years immediately following World War II.² In the previous year the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day caused public discontent when the government initially decided on a day of frivolous celebrations rather than a sombre, reflective commemoration for the fallen. Noakes, commenting on the above, also notes that these events ‘highlight the continuing importance in Britain of the Second World War’ and that the war ‘is remarkably resonant in British culture, apparent not just at times of anniversary but recurrently in books, newspapers, television and radio, museums and family histories’.³ Furthermore, Dawson states that ‘One has only to look at the immense range and variety of written histories, as they appear in high street bookshops or on public library shelves, to realise

¹ You may have noticed that ‘England’ has been used in the title but ‘Britain’ is used here and will be at other points in this research. This is because none of the interviewees were interviewed in Scotland or Wales; however, research in this area has largely focussed on a ‘British’ memory, and this work aligns itself with some of the themes begun by researchers studying how Britain represents the Second World War. Thus, when I am discussing my own work I will endeavour to use the term ‘England’, but when discussing memory of World War II in a broader sense, and how the participants narratives compare to this ‘British’ memory, using ‘Britain’ will be more appropriate.
³ Ibid., pp.2-3.
that the [Second World] war is one of the supremely popular moments in British history.\(^4\)

Janice Hadlow from Channel Four Television estimated that ‘on any evening in the UK it is now possible to see at least one programme related to the Second World War and the Holocaust’.\(^5\) Chapman has also commented that 90 per cent of all British war films are about the Second World War.\(^6\) Furthermore, Dillon argues that since the financial crisis worsened in 2008 television companies have increasingly used the past as a means of reassurance. He notes that 331 out of 1094 historical programmes were dedicated to the First and Second World Wars and that ‘this recovering of wartime victories in times of uncertainty does permit a society unsure of its present and future to have a token form of security of sorts’.\(^7\) Thus, the British public are subjected to a range of representations about the Second World War from the media. However, this is a two way process, the media would not devote so much time to it if it was not also a popular topic and there was demand for these programmes.

World War II also remains a popular subject in school curricula in Britain. However, although the war in Western Europe receives a great amount of attention the war in the Pacific can be completely ignored and space dedicated to the Eastern Front can be as short as a couple of sentences, as Foster has noted.\(^8\) Thus, the actual focus on what elements of the Second World War are highlighted to the British public, not only in schools but through the media, is often a selective process. Despite this Riera and Schaffer argue that ‘the Second World War became the past that refused to become

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history’. Thus events still remain very much a part of public consciousness and incidents are moulded into a usable past to make sense of experience. Collective memory will be discussed further later, however, I wish to emphasise that to study a collective or agreed version of the past is only possible if it remains in the public perception. To create and maintain a collective memory an ongoing social discussion of the event must be present and this is ‘critical to the organisation and assimilation of the event in the form of collective narrative’.9

A multi-generational oral history study of collective memory of the Second World War in England is needed to add the British discourse to the memory research of World War II already conducted in seven other European countries (Denmark, Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, Serbia, Croatia and Switzerland). Most notably this was done with Harald Welzer’s study into family remembrance of National Socialism and the Holocaust in Germany, upon which much of the methodology for this study is based.10 Memory of World War II is much more pertinent in Germany than elsewhere because of their role as the main perpetrator of war crimes during World War II. Indeed in the 1950s a new phrase- Vergangenheitsbewältigung- literally meaning ‘overcoming the past’ surfaced in West Germany. In Welzer’s project forty families were interviewed, both in a family setting and individually, to discover how they represented their own knowledge of history within familial memory. Welzer concluded that ‘Cognitive knowledge of history pales beside the emotional relationship to the past that comes from one’s own grandparents talking about their lives’ and that there was ‘a clear tendency on the part of grandchildren to rewrite their grandparents’ histories into

tales of anti-Nazi heroism and resistance”. Thus the stories ‘became so altered that in the end they undergo a complete change of meaning. This reconfiguration generally functions to turn grandparents into people of constant moral integrity, according to today’s standards and normative appraisal. Welzer also concluded a paradox in education about the Nazi past within participants; that ‘the more comprehensive the knowledge about war crimes, persecution and extermination, the stronger is the need to develop stories to reconcile the crimes of “the Nazis” or “the Germans”, and the moral integrity of parents or grandparents.” Thus the argument was that greater education of a subject did not necessarily promote a more objective response to the facts within the participants. Furthermore, Jensen agrees and found from his interview based research in Germany that ‘From a social psychological point of view, there is a clash between knowledge of history and the obligations of loyalty that families instil in their members’. In Britain there is certainly neither the level of emotional response about perpetrator guilt when discussing the Second World War nor the need to justify actions. However, as we shall see, the responses from participants did not always follow the prevailing ideas on how World War II is remembered in Britain. In the chapter on the Holocaust this study will argue that greater education has actually increased sensitivity to the plight of European Jewry, in contrast to Welzer’s findings in the German project.

Generational studies have also been conducted specifically in the area of Holocaust survivors and their families, and these have produced interesting conclusions. For instance, Hass noted that ‘The psychological after-effects of the survivors’ trauma

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11 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
12 Ibid., pp.7-8.
14 O. Jensen, “‘One goes left to the Russians, the other goes right to the Americans’”- Family Recollections of the Holocaust in Europe”, in M. Davies, and C. Szejnmann (eds), How the Holocaust Looks Now: International Perspectives, (Basingstoke, 2006), p.27.
are often mirrored in the attitudes, perceptions, and fears of their offspring’.\footnote{A. Hass, \textit{In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Second Generation}, (London, 1991), p.7.} Furthermore, Reading studied how collective or social Holocaust memory is inherited ‘through a variety of cultural mediations in ways that are gendered’.\footnote{Reading, \textit{Social Inheritance of the Holocaust}, p. 2.} This was part of her study of how Holocaust memory was approached within families and how inherited memory was not just social but had gender influences. Within this she noted the matriarchal influence in many Jewish families and therefore how a silence about what had happened, especially from the grandmother, affected the later generations with feelings of secrecy and shame within the family. In this study there is less of a defined gender role in how families discuss and approach their pasts. Families often draw memories from many different family members, both male and female, and the open interview technique used encouraged them to approach the subject as broadly as they wished.

Whereas the interviewing technique has been popular in Holocaust research, there are relatively few studies that use generational oral history to explore other areas of the social meaning of memory. In his 2001 article exploring British collective memory and World War II in film Geoff Eley noted that whilst cinema offered a chance for the study of public meanings of the Second World War to be rethought, further work such as oral histories like those carried out in Germany and Italy could lead to ‘an interpretive approach to ordinary people’s lives… addressing social history’s subjective and experiential dimensions’.\footnote{G. Eley, ‘Finding the People’s War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II’, in \textit{The American Historical Review}, Vol.106, No.3, (June 2001), p.828.} Thus Eley is suggesting, and I agree, that the study of opinions and feelings about the past is an important addition to social history. Through this we can learn about how the past is used in ways that encourage social cohesion through agreed narratives of shared history. The way to study these elements is best
approached from a national perspective as here we find broad collective memories that are crystallised and distinct. Fogu and Kansteiner noted from national studies in their edited volume that no European collective memory was discernible on common threads along the lines of victors, losers or neutral nations, yet the national collective was the dominant and most noticeable force.\textsuperscript{18} In his edited volume Peitsch attempted to raise the question as to what degree the memories of the Second World War had become Europeanised.\textsuperscript{19} However, the essays in the collection were still largely based on national surveys and interestingly no articles focusing on Britain were included.

In her study of how young people react to the Holocaust in film, Reading contends that people who were not contemporary witnesses of the events glean their knowledge from many media sources including television and film, however, the most significant is personal encounters with survivors, teachers, or family members.\textsuperscript{20} Although Matauschek disagrees with this, and in her study of Denmark and the Netherlands suggests that ‘the media, especially films, and to a lesser degree education’ are the primary sources for young people’s knowledge of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{21} However, she also concluded that ‘the stories that are handed down within families emphasise the suffering of family members and some brave acts of resistance’.\textsuperscript{22} This use of familial memory could just as easily apply to the representation of the Second World War in general as well as the Holocaust. This reinforces my opinion that family recollections using oral sources is a neglected area in our study of World War II and the Holocaust in Britain. Thus, this project will yield new and interesting results that will contribute to

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid.}
our knowledge of how this period is remembered from a different perspective. I will also look at the way education influences people, as mentioned above. In his study of how to better understand how to teach schoolchildren history Wineburg concluded that collective memory was the force to be reckoned with in teaching and learning.23 By conducting oral interviews this study will demonstrate that historical knowledge, especially from third generation members, can be linked to studies concerning how history is portrayed in school history textbooks and curriculum.

Oral history work on how the Second World War is remembered in Britain does exist. Penny Summerfield researched how women remembered their wartime working lives and concluded that women who remembered themselves as ‘heroic’ looked to challenge existing gender bias whereas women who were in jobs characterised as more traditional ‘women’s work’ were not in a position to claim equality.24 Summerfield interviewed 42 women specifically about their memories of working in wartime Britain with the aim of studying gendered memories of the Second World War. However, historians have studied the memory of the Second World War in Britain using sources other than oral testimony, focussing particularly on the ideas surrounding certain ‘myths’ about the event. What we mean by myth I will more clearly define below, but first it will be beneficial to survey some of the features of British memory of World War II already commented upon by scholars. Grafton provides us with a collection of primary sources of narratives from interviews whose opinions fit less comfortably into the popular version of the ‘People’s War’. However, these narratives are largely without authorial comment until a short ‘Afterword’ at the end of the book. Furthermore, Grafton states that the purpose of the book was to see how the myths stood up to

individual recollection of the war years. In this sense he was not trying to engage with any of the reasons behind why certain versions of the past are created and enter popular memory but simply provided sources to redress the balance of memory away from the version of World War II he saw as incomplete.

One of the key recent texts is Connelly’s survey of British memory of the Second World War using primary evidence such as films, newspapers, comics, radio and popular images to draw his conclusions. In his introduction Connelly points out that although there are many myths about the Second World War, some general themes can be identified. He notes how it is highlighted that in 1939 Britain was unprepared for war and the defeat in France was humiliating; however, Britain gained a strong leader in Winston Churchill and the miracle of Dunkirk was a great feat; after this Britain stood alone and won the Battle of Britain and it was the people who held their nerve and stood firm; after this Montgomery went on to defeat Rommel in North Africa and new allies helped Britain turn the tide of the war up to D-Day and beyond to Hitler’s suicide. In Japan the Americans dropped the atomic bomb to end the war, though the Far East is much less prominent in the British myth. Furthermore, Britain deserved the appreciation of the rest of the world for standing alone against Hitler. Out of these general areas of focus Connelly stresses that it is the moments when ‘Britain stood alone and took it on the chin’ that are most prized and valued in the British interpretation, such as Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, and the Blitz, because of the pride this exudes in the way the people persevered alone against insurmountable odds. Also that the Blitz appeals to many people about the war because it is easily understood, is

26 M. Connelly, We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War, (Harlow, 2004), pp.1-2.  
27 Ibid., p.14, and later further reference to this p.55. Also see M. Smith, Britain and 1940, Myth and Popular Memory, (London, 2000), p.30 for a comment on Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz being a popular metanarrative because of the myth of the British people ‘overcoming the odds’.
exciting to children, and involves everyone from any gender or age. In his study Connelly asserts at the very beginning that the British myth contains many elements of truth and should be viewed as an interpretation rather than an attempt to falsify the record. However, he later also cautions that the reliance on World War II rhetoric by the press when England faced Germany at the 1990 World Cup and 1996 European Championships is deeply problematic because it indicates an inability to discriminate between the myth of the war and the present reality. Thus whilst myths can teach us much about a society’s values and vision of itself, this can become distorted. In the case of the football rivalry it demonstrates that a close NATO ally and European partner in Germany can still be described in negative terms regarding its World War II past, that in turn elevates contemporary Britain into a position of superiority over Germany.

The propaganda response of the British wartime government was very much in accordance with the general themes Connelly has written about. Chapman has noted that films such as Millions Like Us (1943) and In Which We Serve (1942) promoted unity. For example, in In Which We Serve the Royal Navy ship HMS Torrin is used as a metaphor for the whole country being united behind their Churchillian style leader. Furthermore, Foster comments that ‘The ideals of national unity were a key feature of the government’s response to the trials of 1940 and every opportunity was taken to reinforce and promote them.’ However, this was not the only element that was emphasised, and linked to this is also Rose’s argument that ‘Patriotic discourse in World War II centrally featured the idea that the members of the national community were self-sacrificing citizens… Entreaties that individuals should be self-sacrificing, placing the community’s interests and needs above their own were omnipresent in the

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28 Ibid., p.130.
29 Connelly, We Can Take It!, p.1.
30 Ibid., p. 290.
What is evident from all of the scholarly work quoted is the overwhelming positive way the war is remembered in Britain. Traits such as unity, sacrifice and a stoic response to the war situation all reflect well on the British people. These works were consulted before the analysis of the interviews and throughout this thesis I have tried to point out areas where the reading of the secondary material may have influenced the interpretation of the narrative source material. However, I have attempted to be as objective as possible in this work and topics such as unity and sacrifice are all areas that were evident in the interviewees’ responses and I will demonstrate examples of this later. However, we shall also explore areas where there were discrepancies with these more general myths about the Second World War.

World War II was a period where the government reinvented what it was to be English, largely to garner continued support for the war. As Mandler has written the people were ‘constantly bombarded with intimate descriptions of what they themselves were like’. Mandler’s work charts the changing nature of what it means to be English and the attempt to define an English national character since the 19th century. In reading his work the fluid and changing nature of an English national character reminds us how such abstract ideas, linked to popular representations, can be manipulated by many factors and are essentially unstable. Yet we also see the importance for people of embedding their individual selves into something that has greater meaning such as being a part of a nation, a collective, and assuming certain positive characteristics for oneself. His view of the English being portrayed to themselves as quintessentially good people who have had war enforced upon them and so must respond with a strong spirit with which to defend themselves underpins many of the war myths mentioned above.

and that will be looked at in this study and is important to consider.\textsuperscript{35} In her study about British national identity and citizenship in World War II Rose recognises that even though there are many collective sub-identities and groups below the national level, she argues that at times of war it is the national identity that people focus most upon.\textsuperscript{36} Rose’s research is based around theoretical ideas concerning the basis of citizenship and feelings about belonging to the nation as one of its citizens. To achieve this Rose studied solely material published during the war years such as films, books, newspapers, diaries, pamphlets, and data from Mass Observation polls. This produced an excellent survey of qualitative data relating to a collective consciousness from the period. However, in making the statement that it is the nation that subsumes other groups that generate collective memories Rose has not used data post-1945, including oral sources. This study will indicate that the national collective memory is not always the one individuals use to narrate their experiences.

It has also been highlighted, especially within the historiography of the last twenty years that the Holocaust plays a relatively small role in the British myth of World War II. Cesarani has noted that World War II is remembered in Britain as an honourable and noble war, fought with right and justice exclusively on the Allied side and, whilst the liberation of Bergen-Belsen and the Nuremburg Trial are large in the nations’ memory, ‘they exist mainly as legitimating symbols of the Just War.’\textsuperscript{37} The legacy of the Second World War has helped shape British attitudes to conflict and World War II is often evoked to persuade people of the righteousness of contemporary conflicts as it demonstrates a key component of what the British believe about their own identity. As Dillon argues ‘The tradition of Britain as a warrior nation that fights for

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp.184-195.
\textsuperscript{36} Rose, \textit{Which People’s War?} p.9.
what it believes is right is a defining and formative element of national character."\(^{38}\)

That it is viewed in this way also promotes World War II to be remembered in positive terms and, unsurprisingly, as a source of national pride. As Britain’s world power status declined ‘it is hardly surprising that many would look back on wartime with a mixture of nostalgia, pride and affection’.\(^{39}\)

‘Myth’ and Collective Memory

The term ‘myth’ is a contentious one that should be used carefully in relation to social history as it is too easy to suggest that all myths are inaccurate versions of the past, which is far too simplistic a view. Burke wryly contends that ‘Positivist historians often use the term “myth” to refer to stories which are not true, in explicit contrast to their own stories, which they call “history”’.\(^{40}\) However, myth in written and oral history memory is not only what is believed to be correct and has been corroborated but also gives a narrative meaning in the historical record; it is a process by which individual experience gains meaning within the broader historical narrative. Thus myths are not a fabrication of history but rather just an emphasis on a certain area, whilst marginalising other viewpoints, to produce an accepted version of history. In his 1995 book Angus Calder also commented that ‘The Blitz supports a myth of British or English moral pre-eminence, buttressed by British unity’.\(^{41}\) However, he then dedicated much of the rest of his study to debunking the myths and demonstrating where the popular memory differed from the historical account. Thus he chose not to focus on how myths and inaccuracies could actually inform us as a research topic. A topic of

\(^{38}\) Dillon, *History on British Television*, p.139.


\(^{40}\) P. Burke, *History and Social Theory (2nd ed)*, (Cambridge, 2005), p.112.

research studying the myths that a nation produces can enlighten how a collective group of people give meaning to their shared past.

Myths occur in all areas of history. As Grele comments ‘myth is a fundamental feature of all historical thought’. Thus, any piece of work about the past, however ‘true’ or ‘correct’ it will attempt to be, cannot escape from some of the underlying beliefs that collective groups hold about themselves from their history. Indeed, Tonkin also notes that despite the criticism of some historians to oral history the element of myth could just as easily be present in written testimonies. This is especially true of the autobiography as a research tool, many traditional historians are happy to use this but do not place the same rigorous demands on the analysis of such sources as they demand from the oral historian. Furthermore, ‘one only has to see the power of historical origins and cultural traditions in modern communities such as Ireland, Israel or Palestine to recognise myth as a powerful historical force’. In these societies an accepted version about the past ownership of land and in some cases a sense of injustice, perceived or otherwise, about not owning that land now can galvanise heightened emotions in the national collective. In these collectives accepted versions of the past can be used to drive political movements and, in extreme cases, terrorist acts. In these instances by promoting a certain version of the past some societies can attempt to direct the future course of a nation.

Smith argues that myths tend to emerge, or are most prominent, at times of cultural, economic, and social changes, and often this is coupled with a threat to the community. Thus times of war, and in particular the Second World War in Britain, are

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periods where myth-making will be heightened within the nation. This is perhaps not a surprise if we consider that strong narratives have to be developed to justify coping with heavy loss or upheaval. For Smith creating myths is the key element to forming any type of social bond between people. He contends that any social group or nation only becomes a social group or nation when they have a common mythology, and a common sense of the past is a very significant element in the collective identity of any interpretive community.\footnote{Smith, Britain and 1940, p.2} With regards to World War II he suggests that 1940 was particularly easy to mythicise because so many people got involved in some aspect of the war effort and this was so different from normal life.\footnote{Ibid., p.60.} Therefore, not only do myths help form a social cohesion but also that the myths we have mentioned from World War II above are particularly resilient and well founded within the British memory. These myths we would expect to be strong and remain relatively unchallenged in the oral testimonies. This assumption, whilst true in some areas, I will challenge as the evidence from the interviews indicates that this is not always the case.

Bill Niven has recently asserted that it ‘is by now an accepted wisdom that we are living at a time of “memory” rather than “history”’.\footnote{B. Niven, ‘On the Use of “Collective Memory”’, in German History, (July, 2008), Vol.26, No.3, p.427.} In this article Niven charted the rise of memory studies and analysed how various scholars had attempted to modify the theory of collective memory in recent years. However, he was left to conclude that the term ‘collective memory’ was not going to disappear from academic writing in the near future, and actually its vagueness was part of the appeal for scholars wishing to use it as a theoretical basis for their work in this relatively new branch of history that Niven calls the ‘historiography of memory’.\footnote{Ibid.} Stier also notes the dispute over the term collective memory and highlights the fact that Novick prefers the term ‘historicity of
events’ because he does not want to see the past reduced to a ‘mythic archetype’.\(^{50}\) In other words whilst he accepts the notion of the past be framed through various contemporary social factors, it would be wrong to judge history a series of accepted stories. History is not a collection of agreed stories that aligns itself with modern values, however, the needs of the present and the desire for social cohesion can influence how societies view their shared history. Other scholars also differ in their interpretation of collective memory. For instance Tonkin rejects the notion of ‘collective’ memory altogether because she emphasises the individual influences that impact upon peoples’ lives; instead she prefers the term ‘social memory’ because she recognises a process of ‘socialisation’ whereby people come to accept the standards of their social environment.\(^{51}\) Within this she therefore claims that history has a double meaning of ‘what has happened and what people say has happened’.\(^{52}\) Sociologists Schwartz and Zerubavel are also more cautious and see a dialectic between historical memory and the historical record.\(^{53}\) However, they cannot, and nor do they try, to dismiss the ideas behind a collective memory that describes the way that groups of people who share a common identity create ‘accepted’ versions of the past.

It was Halbwachs, whose breakthrough collective memory theory has endured since the 1920s, who wrote that ‘there exists a collective memory and a social framework for memory’ and our ‘individual thought places itself in these frameworks’ for recall.\(^{54}\) He also contends that the past does not recur but ‘is reconstructed on the

\(^{50}\) O. Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust*, (Boston, 2003), pp.7-8.


\(^{52}\) Ibid., p.117.


This opinion has attracted criticism because of the way it disregards the possibility of any continuity in history. For instance, by demonstrating the relevance of Confucius in contemporary China and throughout the Communist regime, Zhang and Swartz have criticised Halbwach’s assumption that collective memory is only a reconstruction of the past. Rather, they argue, it is possible for strong traditions to exist alongside a collective memory influenced by past and present policies. This is a valid argument; however, Halbwachs’s theory that a version of the past is created in the present for contemporary needs endures, because it offers a way to study how certain elements of history are used in a modern day society.

However, it is important for us to try to define what we mean by collective memory, as Klein reminds us ‘We speak quite often of collective memory but seem not to mean what Maurice Halbwachs meant by the term’. A ‘society’ could be any group of people that considers itself to hold common beliefs or a shared identity. Therefore, we can talk of a British society but also societies on a city basis, or those who share the same religious beliefs. Halbwachs also used the term ‘group’ to describe these different societies and points out that a person can be a member of many different groups at the same time and so their memories can be placed in many different frameworks. A group that Halbwachs highlights is the family and he argues that the ‘family group is accustomed to retrieving or reconstructing all its other memories following a logic of its own’.

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55 Ibid., p. 40. Bartlett, writing after Halbwachs in 1932 from a Psychology background agreed with many of Halbwachs ideas and stated that ‘when a number of people are organised into a social group… this group speedily develops certain characteristics peculiar to itself, which directly constrains the behaviour of individual members’. See F. Bartlett, Remembering. A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology, (Cambridge, 1995), p.281.


58 Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, p.52.
I would consider this family remembrance a more ‘private’ collective memory as it is formed separate from larger, community based influences, and can be very different from those collective memories highlighted in a national discourse. Halbwachs goes on to argue that an opinion can be formed from combining the modes of thought relating to the family and other groups’ recollections and ‘at times one or the other of these frameworks prevails’. In researching the memories of working class Communist supporters in Italy from the end of the Second World War Portelli notes that the interviewees spoke of times when they felt they could have succeeded in Communist revolution if not for mistakes and situations out of their control such as the leaders not being in the country, or failure to react quickly enough when Italy surrendered after World War II. Portelli reasons that this was their way of rationalising their failure to produce a Communist Italy post-World War II. Portelli was discovering here a collective memory shared by a distinctive group within Italy, the Communists, that differed from the larger collective memory of the nation. This is what Halbwachs was suggesting when he noted that people can belong to more than one group, in this case they were both Italians and Communists, but one collective framework, in this case the Communist one prevailed over an Italian collective memory about how the nation reacted at the end of World War II. Portelli argues that to voice a view of something that has happened which goes against all other prevailing thought is very difficult and often takes the form of a highly charged emotional response. In this thesis there are times when the interviewees speak of occasions that carry a great emotional response. Indeed, as we shall see, the narratives they use to describe these are not always aligned to the more general ‘British’ collective memories and myths that we discussed above.

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59 Ibid., p.52.
60 Ibid., p.81.
62 Ibid., p.151.
Discussing ‘memory’ and ‘collective memory’ in this study does not indicate a ‘correct’ view of how the past really was from which we can better understand what actually happened. Instead we are looking at memory as a social process whereby certain elements are emphasised and an accepted version of past events is generated by a group or community. Thus ‘memory’ can apply for those people who did not actually witness an event because it becomes a part of the ‘collective memory’. Humans are social beings and in a collective society people find ways to express themselves more securely within accepted social boundaries. As Schudson has commented ‘Where memory can be located in individual minds, it may characterise groups of individuals. In these cases memory is an individual property but so widely shared as to be accurately termed social or collective’.\(^63\) Furthermore, shared histories cement identities within the group to which they belong.\(^64\) Thus it is a two-way process whereby people feed off the memories of the social group to which they belong but also repeat those socially accepted memories to reinforce their position with the social group.

The creation of this social memory within a group comes from the interaction between group members and this is why the narration of a subject between individuals is important. Thus Batra and Messier suggest that as narrative is the way we make sense of the world and because ‘events are witnessed or experienced by various people, passive or active participants, they are stored as a particular and personalised image and/or impression in their individual and/or collective memory through an unconscious process of internalisation’ we then transmit that understanding to others through narrative interaction.\(^65\) Welzer agrees and emphasises that ‘social memory exclusively exists between subjects and not within them; its form of existence consists of

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\(^{65}\) N. Batra, and V. Messier (eds), Narrating the Past: (Re)Constructing Memory, (Re)Negotiating History, (Newcastle, 2007), p.5.
communication."\(^{66}\) Thus the memories we internalise are drawn from our interaction with many social influences around us - only hermits could claim that these influences do not affect them.

However, in writing about a collective memory we should not ignore the fact that it is individuals who create and maintain these memories. Crane reminds us in her article to ‘relocat[e] the collective back in the individual who articulates it - the individual who disappeared in the occlusion of personal historical consciousness by the culture of preservation.’\(^{67}\) She urges us to acknowledge that ‘collective memory ultimately is located not in sites but in individuals’ and that those ‘Individuals provide interpretations for other individuals, and these are dealt with as information to be assimilated, remembered, or archived, to create the multiple pasts Halbwachs described, and this is a lived experience.’\(^{68}\) Thus, we are drawn away once more from the suggestion that the past is 100 per cent agreed upon and packaged in peoples’ minds as complete mythic narratives about the past. Instead, there are common themes that we can find evidence for in collectives such as the nation, but ultimately individual recollection is far more complex than this. Many influences may sway what an individual feels is important or how they view the past and part of the skill of the historian working with oral sources is to offer suggestions why the past may be remembered in certain ways. Furthermore, during the oral history interview the ‘act of authoring is a claim to authority’, as Tonkin reminds us.\(^{69}\) By this she means that whoever is narrating the story of the past does so in a way that they believe is absolutely correct and we should also view the event through the way that they remember it. It is the individual’s story and they have authority over what parts should

\(^{66}\) Welzer, ‘Re-narrations’, p.5.
\(^{68}\) Ibid., pp.1381-1382.
\(^{69}\) Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts, p.8.
be remembered to the listener. Thus using individuals through the interview process, is an excellent way of studying collective memory as it is remembered within many groups. It is also useful for looking at individual cases where the private memory from the individual or family is in conflict with the prevailing collective or public memory that the larger group displays. Indeed, Kansteiner argues that ‘we have to differentiate between different types of “social” memory, autobiographical memory on the one hand and collective memory on the other’. Kansteiner is arguing for the many individual narratives also to be given a voice alongside the metanarrative of collective memory. Thus, the interplay between these opposing forces generates for the researcher an opportunity to offer new insights into the memory of a particular topic such as World War II in Britain.

We have already mentioned the differences between private and public memory, however this needs further defining in relation to this project. Since Halbwachs’ thesis on collective memory many scholars have taken up the idea of how our memories of the past are constructed and applied it to academic research, constantly re-evaluating the theory whilst keeping in mind the main implications of Halbwachs assertions. We have already mentioned how people use memory and History to create accepted versions of the past which aids the social cohesion of the various ‘groups’ Halbwach’s mentioned. The implications of this for Kammen is that ‘Memory distortion can occur because of a profound desire for social or religious autonomy; or the face of public opinion; or because of the desire for social accommodation or assimilation’. Thus, the idea that memory is fallible, often prone to inaccuracies because people wished to align their own past with that of the larger community they belonged to, became established in

academic thought. Furthermore, this led to the idea of one person being a part of many collectives that they draw their memories from and that ‘One is always part of several mnemonic communities and collective remembering can be explored on very different scales; it takes place in the very private settings as well as the public sphere’.\textsuperscript{72} The idea of a more private memory, perhaps not supportive of collective memories of the nation, is important for this study. As was mentioned above, the collective memory is not always the memory emphasised in the narratives of the interviewees; and this idea needs discussing further.

Noakes discusses the concept of public and private memories and concludes that, rather than being opposing forces, they ‘are essentially interactive: private memories can be validated when they are shared by large numbers of people, thus gaining access to the public field of representation, while dominant public or popular memory has to have a purchase with most people’s personal memories of the war years in order to become widely accepted.’\textsuperscript{73} However, this opinion omits the idea that private memories, personal or within smaller groups than the national collective such as the family, can have recollections of the past that are markedly different and have not been affected by the public memory of certain events. Summerfield has written on this topic, highlighting ‘composure’ and its importance in considering oral history interviews. She draws from work by Dawson to argue that as well as composing their narrative interviewees also must compose themselves and to achieve composure the individual must construct a ‘version of the self that the teller can live with in relative psychic ease’.\textsuperscript{74} Thus difficulties of composure can arise not from an interviewee not being able to align their own memories with that which they feel may their audience may not be

\textsuperscript{73} Noakes, \textit{War and the British}, p.13.
able to comprehend because it was not part of a more collective experience that is reinforced through popular memory. When surveying the roles of young men who stayed on the Home Front and women who took on militarised roles during World War II Summerfield concluded that because their memories did not have wider cultural framework within which to place their narratives there was a difficulty of composure in their stories, they found it difficult to articulate their memories during interviewing. This idea directly relates to how ‘private’, as opposed to ‘public’, memories are dealt with in this research. It informs us that private memories are difficult to express, especially with a relative stranger and in the short time of an interview setting. Thus those that are mentioned we can assume to have a significant emotional investment for the narrator. Furthermore, we should be aware that memories that do not align themselves with the collective memory may still use the phrases and context of the popular memory as the interviewee seeks to be understood by their audience.

The Popular Memory Group contributed much to the ideas surrounding popular memory and its use in oral history projects. They developed much of the work behind the idea that our memories are composed to align ourselves with dominant collective memories as this is a comfortable context within which to place our individual experience. Out of this came the argument that the way our memories are expressed is actually a part of a ‘cultural circuit’. This phrase is used to express the fact that popular memories do not just appear without the input of individuals. It is individual memory that first informs public consciousness and can then be used in popular media such as television programmes, film, books, and newspapers amongst others. This representation in popular culture then informs (or re-informs) the individual memory of

75 Ibid., pp.92-93.
those who experienced and event to create an accepted, or collective, memory. The cultural circuit can inform us further on the role of composure we were discussing above. When a particular individual memory fails to make it into the cultural circuit then it becomes marginalised and difficult for the narrator to articulate. This can be seen in Thompson’s case study of Fred, an Anzac who fought for Australia in the First World War. Fred only found it possible to align his traumatic memories of war within a public discourse once anti-war and peace movements gained popularity after the 1960s.\textsuperscript{77} Fred’s memory had entered a cultural circuit by which he felt his story could be understood.

Earlier we discussed the ideas behind how ‘myths’ shape our vision of the past. When discussing myth in relation to his research on oral history studies Grele argues that myth derives from the current culture and offers a version of history that stems from the need to validate that culture. However, he also then suggests that this differs from ideology as that seeks to mould a vision of history to direct the future.\textsuperscript{78} Thus myth can be seen as an accepted version of history within a culture, whereas personal ideology may be present as a belief about history that satisfies the need to remember the past in a certain way to direct future action. Grele quite rightly points out that the interviewing experience can reveal the contradictions between myth, ideology and reality.\textsuperscript{79} These contradictions demonstrate another area where individual or small scale collective memories such as the family unit can highlight memories very different from those which inhabit the larger national consciousness. In this study we will indeed see how individual and family memories can at times differ markedly from a British

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.140-141.
collective memory of World War II that has been proposed by other scholars who have neglected the use of oral interviews as a research tool.

It is important that we keep in mind that a collective memory, however strongly embedded into a group consciousness, is not a fixed way of remembering the past and can be altered by changing contemporary needs. Wineburg suggests that what is remembered or forgotten from the past is constantly being shaped by contemporary social processes, acts of state that commemorate certain events and not others, decisions by novelists and filmmakers over which story to tell, and collective and social needs that draw on some elements of the past whilst leaving others dormant. Hartman actually makes a distinction between the terms collective and public memory. Whereas he argues collective memory is historical and politicised, public memory he views as a product of our world with 24-hour news channels and a saturation of information, and appears frantic and reactionary. Thus popular memory he argues is not as stable as collective memory of an event, it may surface in the public consciousness only for a short amount of time before being replaced. In Hartman’s theory I would argue that these smaller public memories will however, be situated within the more stable collective memory of an event. Any challenge to a collective memory would be a much larger force that would either be quickly discarded or go through a much more sustained process of overhauling an established collective memory to become the new orthodoxy. Thus the phrases ‘collective’ and ‘public’ memory can be used synonymously to describe generally accepted versions of the past within societies.

Shatter contends that as human beings we take aspects of our lives and ‘give them socially intelligible and legitimate formulation, which makes them of use to us in

some way’.\textsuperscript{82} This is similar to what we have already mentioned from other scholars concerning our memories helping us make sense of our experiences in the world in a way that combines what we actually experienced with a socially acceptable way of describing that experience. However, he disregards the idea of memory as simply a ‘retrieval of a representation’ as encompassing ‘the worst aspects of subjectivism’.\textsuperscript{83} Thus memory is an ongoing process being continually shaped and reshaped by other experiences and influences. Therefore when the interviewee is repeating a memory, it is not the first time that memory has been relayed. As Grele argues each time it is told ‘it is within the linguistic, logical, and factual limits of the time of telling as well as the limits of public and private memory, and thus each time it is changed. It is the oral historians task, through research, to understand the history of these telling and then to explain contradictions within the story, contextualise the telling, and thereby help the narrators create the fullest possible narrative possible at this moment in time.’\textsuperscript{84} Thus the ‘memories’ we are discussing are not only collective and culturally determined, but they are recollections and representations of the event that are particular to the era they are being remembered within. Furthermore, people retain certain values from their past and use these when formulating and recalling memories and these influence how events are remembered whenever they are recalled. Indeed Grele continues to state that remembering is a process dynamically related to history, being altered from generation to generation and in this sense past experience becomes a complicated process of historical reconstruction.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid.}, p.135.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Ibid.}, p.73.
The Thesis Structure

The main body of the thesis is split into two sections that give a detailed picture of some of the main topics that derived from the interviews. The first section is concerned with looking at some of the abstract topics that have been highlighted by other scholars and have been mentioned above when we discussed the myths about the Second World War that exist in Britain. Thus, the initial four chapters are concerned with demonstrating how ‘Defiance’, ‘Sacrifice’, ‘Unity and Collective Fortitude’, and a sense of ‘Nostalgia’ were discussed within the interviews. In these sections I will demonstrate how the use of oral interviews can offer insights into collective memory more detailed than some of the current work exploring these ideas in popular memory. For instance, we will see how defiance can symbolise a fatalistic attitude in some and be represented as humour for others. We will also see a significant lack of victimisation in the way participants actually describe war memories. In chapter three the use of oral sources allows us to examine some tensions between the idea of a truly unified Britain during the Second World War and the reality that this was not always the case. Included in this are instances where the participants explicitly contradict the national collective memories that have been highlighted with memories that do not align with the chapter headings mentioned. In this sense we will also see clear disagreement between the public and private memories of World War II. Finally, in chapter four we will see how positive memories of wartime experience in England can lead to a sanitising of events and this will also lead to an argument that there are hints within the interviews that this can make it difficult for those who were in the armed services, and had less positive war memories as a result, to articulate their feelings adequately. In setting out the first four chapters this way I am aware that this appears to have the effect of setting the interviews against the work already conducted by scholars in this area. However, as
may have been expected, there did appear a correlation in the interviewees’ responses to topics of collective memory already covered by the secondary literature. The way the interviews and the generational approach have been used reflect foremost an attempt to analyse the narratives independently of any prior knowledge; however, we cannot ignore the internal influences with which we all approach source material.

In the second part of the thesis I will concentrate less on these abstract ideas and write about some more concrete instances that to a greater or lesser extent impacted on England during World War II. This will begin with chapter five- ‘Holocaust’, and then move on to look at ‘Allies’, commenting on how the Americans and Russians are perceived, and ‘Axis’, surveying particularly how the Germans and Japanese are discussed. Until recently the Holocaust had received limited attention in Britain, remaining out of the public consciousness and thus, one would presume, alienated from a British framework of memory. Cesarani has noted that in the immediate aftermath of World War II there was little will to examine the fate of European Jewry in Britain beyond the Jewish community itself. Therefore, it may seem odd to study the subject of the Holocaust using oral sources in an English context because the participants would seemingly have very little to say. However, what was said in my sample is interesting in looking at how English people have responded to an enormous human tragedy that they were aware of, and to a certain extent involved in through the liberation of the camps, but that ultimately had very little direct effect on the lives of the majority of the population. As part of the discussion about the Second World War the Holocaust formed part of the interviews, sometimes brought up by the participants but often initiated as a subject by the interviewer. A lack of knowledge concerning the Holocaust was most notable in the interviews with the contemporary witnesses. All of

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them could comment on the emotional disgust towards the events of the Holocaust but there was very little in the way of elaboration. In contrast the second and third generation members were able to elaborate a little further and discuss some of the iconic Holocaust imagery in their interviews. Although the Holocaust was not part of many of the interviewees’ personal experience, a ‘collective attitude’, perhaps, rather than collective memory in this instance, is discernible amongst the participants. We will make some suggestions for reasons for this that involve how the Holocaust is taught in schools, and the British cultural approach to West Germany post-1945 at the onset of the Cold War.

When looking at Britain’s Allies during World War II the participants discussed Americans and Russians. It was perhaps not surprising that the Americans were discussed in much more detail especially as British people had much more contact with them than the Russians. This did follow largely what previous work done in this area had highlighted. However, the extent to which Russia as an ally was marginalised was interesting to look at particularly when certain case studies from people who may have been expected to know more were taken into account. Within the ‘Axis’ the focus is on how Germany and Japan are represented within the British memory. We will see how Germany and Germans have been almost fully rehabilitated in the British memory so that a sense of anger towards them has almost entirely disappeared. Conversely, Japan and the Japanese have not gone through this same post-war process and there is evidence of resentment towards them in the interviews. This is particularly pertinent when the interviewees have a personal link to someone who was a POW of the Japanese during World War II. Similar to the Holocaust the Eastern campaign tends to receive much less attention in Britain than the Western Front. I will argue that the interviewees’ knowledge of British prisoners of war of the Japanese can be linked
theoretically to the knowledge of the Holocaust in Britain. Much like the Holocaust before the 1960s, British POWs of the Japanese on their return were marginalised, misunderstood, and their stories were private, perhaps only to be mentioned in the company of comrades who had been through similar experiences. Those interviewees who knew former British POWs of the Japanese commented how they never talked about it, even to close family members.

Therefore, this study will provide empirical data for the existing theories that surround how the Second World War is remembered in England. This body of information will be accessed directly from the individuals who should be encompassing the theories on collective memory from this period into their memories, representations, and knowledge of the past. I will examine and suggest reasons why certain narratives are popular amongst the participants- why describing the past in a certain way is useful for the social cohesion of a community. Logically, if there are versions of the past that society focuses upon then there will be areas that are marginalised. Oral history offers us the opportunity to hear these recollections that do not conform to the metanarrative of British war memory, and to hear from the people whose memories lie outside the accepted stories about World War II history. I hope this piece will spark new discussions and provoke research in new areas concerning how the Second World War is remembered in Britain.
Oral History and Qualitative Research

The main primary source for this project is the sample of inter-generational family oral interviews and also those interviews conducted with groups from each generation. I will speak further about the configuration of the participants and interview form later but first let us look briefly at the development of oral history and how it will be used in this work. Oral history became popular with the onset of readily available recording devices in the late 1950s and 1960s and was seen as a way of recording the history of minority groups whose past experiences were not necessarily documented. However, oral history was criticised by some historians because they claimed memory was unreliable for research purposes and was distorted by nostalgia. Thus some basic guidelines were created, models from sociology, psychology and anthropology were used to determine bias, as well as applying checks on reliability similar to documented historical sources. From the 1970s onwards historians such as Alessandro Portelli have defended the role of memory in oral history. It is argued that oral history is exceptional because it uses memory as ‘an active process of creation of meanings’ rather than a ‘passive repository of facts’, and this makes it a worthwhile venture.¹ Also from the 1970s oral historians were conscious of the criticism of positivism in the interview method and sought to analyse memory study in new ways. Portelli was at the forefront of this revised approach to memory study and in his article ‘What Makes Oral History Different’, first published in 1979, he suggested a fresh approach to oral history research. In this work Portelli argued that ‘Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now

think they did... The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge".\(^2\) Thus, oral history is well suited to study the selective recall of memory that we discussed earlier.

This work has been continued by other oral historians from the 1980s onwards to create a solid intellectual background for oral history memory study. In Britain the Popular Memory Group developed out of Birmingham University, and in 1982 proposed:

‘[W]e need to expand the idea of historical production well beyond the limits of academic history writing. We must include all the ways in which a sense of the past is constructed in our society. These do not necessarily take a written or literary form. Still less do they conform to academic standards of scholarship or canons of truthfulness. Academic history has a particular place in a much larger process. We call this the “social production of memory”’.\(^3\)

Thus from the late 1970s oral historians were arguing that the unreliability of memory was a strength and Frisch contended that oral history showed ‘how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experiences and social content, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them’.\(^4\) Thus one could contend that if the past is part of the present, then the past is the present, and memory of the past is always present. As Portelli suggests, ‘Historical work using oral sources is unfinished because of the nature of the sources; historical work excluding oral sources (where available) is incomplete by definition’.\(^5\)

In this sense oral historians were carving a place for their work within the historical discourse and defending oral sources from criticisms concerned with their reliability.

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The argument was, and remains, that oral history has much to teach us about how people use the past in their lives and that this should be used alongside other historical methodologies where applicable.

By 1990 Samuel and Thompson had published *The Myths We Live By* and were highlighting the fact that historians such as Hayden White considered all of history narrative and furthermore, that all knowledge, including history, was created through the agency of language and discourse.\(^6\) Thus oral historians began to redefine the nature of their study and noted that it is important that historians recognise how the process of remembering could be a key to exploring the subjective meanings of lived experience and the nature of individual and collective memory.\(^7\) Indeed, it is Paez’s opinion that ‘Oral history or the cross-generational oral transmissions of collective events is an adequate definition of what Halbwachs considered collective memory’.\(^8\) He was considering that collective memory could be found within the stories about the past that are passed down through the generations. Within these narratives, held by the individual but influenced by wider social surroundings, the elements of collective memory about a particular topic can be found. Thus, using oral testimony to research collective memory would be the most logical option if we agree with Paez’s assumptions. This idea of using oral history to study the social memory of past events has gained much ground in the academic community. Whereas representations of the past were criticised for their epistemological inaccuracies, they have now become ‘reconceptualised as memories that are removed from the judgement and arbitrary standards of scholarship and have

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gained a new respect as meaningful explanations in their own right’. Thus rather than trying to justify accuracy in representations of the past the study of historical bias has become a subject for academic study all of its very own.

This has led to criticisms that the study of meanings of memory in oral history sources is too strongly based on the subjective understanding of the researcher. However, to what extent can history ever be objective? Benison has commented that objective history would be like reading the phone book; and Collingwood has argued that the historian cannot be objective because it is only when we have a problem in mind that we can begin to look for evidence. Silverman concedes that qualitative research can be influenced by the researcher’s own political viewpoint, but he also argues that for it not to be would be both undesirable and impossible. He also highlights the strength of qualitative data in its ‘ability to study phenomena which are simply unavailable elsewhere’. It has already been mentioned that in analysing the interviews there may well be influences from the secondary material that we must consider. However, as the scholars here have noted a complete objective reading of any text may well be unattainable for any researcher. Oral history research must bear in mind the same limits upon itself as more traditional empirical historical research. However, as with other areas of history, the fact that the results are neither perfect nor are they open to debate, does not diminish its importance in creating new areas for study.

Qualitative, case-study approaches are criticised for their lack of depth and therefore their lack of factual, conclusive arguments that can be drawn from them.

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12 Ibid., p.43.
However, oral history can be used to ‘change the focus of history, and open up new areas of enquiry’ as Thompson has highlighted. Furthermore, criticisms that significant generalisations are difficult to make from oral history, should be outweighed by the important part that it may play in the ‘refinement both of... hypotheses and empirical generalisations’. Elliot cites the example of Lynn Jamieson’s 1987 study into family development in Scotland to illustrate how her sample of interviewees cannot ‘disprove theories about the modern family... But what they can and do achieve is a radical questioning of the conventional theories and methods, and in this way they can lead to new questions and more precise and refined hypotheses’. This study does not intend to completely re-write the theories about a British collective memory of the Second World War. However, what it does reveal are certain areas, caught in the nuances of individual and collective narrative that add extra dimensions to these theories; yet also to highlight areas that non-interviewing research has overlooked and provide new insights for academic debate.

**Uses of interdisciplinary methodologies**

Historical studies such as these are rather interdisciplinary in focus. In particular, oral history projects researching how history is remembered are strongly linked to sociology. This is not necessarily a recent phenomenon: in 1964 E.H. Carr had asked for an open discipline between history and sociology. Yet the relationship between history and sociology has not been an easy one. On one hand there are those historians and sociologists who embraced the idea of studying the societal uses of history, but there are also those in both disciplines much more sceptical who dispute the

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15 Ibid., p.63.
ability of sociology to provide a working model for historians. Yet it is difficult to argue that an oral history project researching collective memory does not have links to sociological practices and theory—let us not forget that Halbwachs himself was a sociologist, not an historian. Indeed, this study could be defined under what sociologist Charles Tilly termed ‘microhistorical’ research; that is the study of ‘individuals and well-defined groups within the limits set by large-scale structures and processes’.17 The individuals and the groups are the interviewees in the family and community setting, whilst the large-scale process is the memory and representation of World War II and the Holocaust within England.

Sociologists Glaser and Strauss wrote about what they termed ‘Grounded Theory’ as a way of analysing Sociology studies. Their premise was that data should be used to produce new theories, rather than studies only being developed to test pre-existing ideas.18 This is not just in the case for sociology; in her study containing advice for narrative research Lieblich suggests that ‘in narrative studies there are usually no priori hypotheses’.19 Thus, the role of the researcher is not just to test theories but to generate new areas of enquiry. This study has both of these elements, there are times when pre-existing ideas about how the Second World War is remembered in Britain are upheld by the interview evidence; however, as mentioned before, there are new areas of enquiry and new nuances on certain areas of study that have been drawn from the empirical data. Glaser and Strauss argue that ‘At the end of the investigation the researcher has a conviction about their theory which does not mean that their analysis is the only plausible one that could be based on their data, but only that they have high confidence in its credibility’.20 Lieblich also notes that narrative ‘work that is carried out

20 Glaser, Grounded Theory, p.225.
is interpretive, and an interpretation is always personal, partial and dynamic. Therefore, narrative research is suitable for scholars who are, to a certain degree, comfortable with ambiguity.\footnote{Lieblich, \textit{Narrative Research}, p.10.} However, ‘interpretive decisions are not “wild”… but require justification’.\footnote{Ibid.} Thus, the analysis may not always be able to be proven completely accurate, but it is more important to discover ideas that may lead to debate in the area. In itself, this is not very different from other areas of academia where just because theories cannot be proved beyond doubt it does not diminish their intellectual value.

Another area influencing this study is anthropology, and in particular the work done by Geertz on how to analyse cultures using ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ description. In Geertz’s theory the ‘thin’ description is the explanation of what is actually happening, and the ‘thick’ description is the interpretation of this- developing meanings and analysis. Much like Glaser and Strauss, within this idea Geertz welcomes ambiguity and disagreements and comments that ‘Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape.’\footnote{C. Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures}, (London, 1973), p.20.} Geertz acknowledges that it is difficult to test the analyses of cultural interpretations, as he states ‘you either grasp an interpretation or you do not, see the point of it or you do not, accept it or you do not.’\footnote{Ibid., p.24.} In this sense Geertz is encouraging the promotion of debate from the analysis of a particular topic. I hope the interpretations involved in this piece are thought provoking and create new lines of enquiry. To that end, whilst I would welcome support for any interpretations, it is not my intention to suggest definitive conclusions that will become a new orthodoxy of Second World War collective memory in Britain, and this should not be the aim of

\footnotetext[21]{Lieblich, \textit{Narrative Research}, p.10.}  
\footnotetext[22]{Ibid.}  
\footnotetext[23]{C. Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures}, (London, 1973), p.20.}  
\footnotetext[24]{Ibid., p.24.}
case-study style oral history projects. I furthermore agree with Geertz that new cultural analysis is not replacing or even building upon previous work but that a ‘study is an advance if it is more incisive- whatever that may mean- than those that preceded it; but it less stands on their shoulders than, challenged and challenging, runs by their side.’

As was suggested earlier, historical studies such as these should be seen as a necessary supplement to the non-oral work that is already part of the discourse. This study is not an anthropological study of a different culture, yet there are areas of Geertz’s work that it will draw from. There will be analysis of the oral interviews that, whilst attempting to survey many possible interpretations, will ultimately come to conclusions that are my own- but these subjective arguments will not necessarily be any different from other pieces of historical work that argue a particular point based on the individual interpretation of a researcher towards a written source. Within this the interpretations may be ‘challenged and challenging’ but they offer a new way of viewing some aspects of World War II memory. Geertz himself acknowledges that complete objectivity is impossible but quotes Robert Solow who says that to therefore give up is ‘like saying that as a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible, one might as well conduct surgery in a sewer.’

The Structure of the Interview Process

As was mentioned earlier the primary evidence that the research is based on is the oral interviews conducted with participants. Mass Observation polls from the period have also been used, however, not as the basis for topics to research and mainly in a supporting role to the arguments derived from the interviews. Mass-Observation polls were born from random sampling and unsystematic techniques but, as Paul Addison has

25 Ibid., p.25.
26 Ibid., p.30.
stated, they are ‘a source for which there is no parallel or substitute in understanding wartime Britain’, and Angus Calder concurs that they are ‘probably the richest source of material available to the social historian of the period’.

Furthermore, as Crawford has noted ‘The MO reports were not intended for publication and as an organisation it never signed the official secrets act, the evidence in these reports therefore contains some of the most candid accounts of the Blitz experience’. Thus they are an invaluable source for analysis alongside contemporary narrative responses about the Second World War.

Multi-generational family interviews were conducted where each of the interviewees were first interviewed individually and then together in an interview comprising all the generations. The generations are categorised as first generation, those who are the contemporary witnesses and can remember wartime events; their children who are the second generation; and their grandchildren who comprise the third generation. Whilst it was attempted to define the age ranges of these generations as first generation being born before 1933, second generation born 1933-75, and third generation born after 1975, clearly family lines and personal memory are not so clear cut. Therefore, there are certain generations in the study that fall outside of these distinct dates. Furthermore, we used the cut-off of 1933 for the first generation as it was important that those contemporary witnesses we interviewed would have a good enough recall of the actual war years to be able to comment effectively upon them. This could have meant that some interviewees characterised as second generation would also have had firsthand knowledge of the Second World War. There were three instances in the interviews where this occurred. One second generation member was born in 1941, and

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two other interviewees classed as second generation were born in 1942 and 1943 respectively. Obviously, in these cases they may have some recollection of the war years but it was considered pertinent to class them as the second generation because any memories would be so limited because of their ages. Furthermore, three participants classed as first generation were born after 1933, two in 1934 and one in 1935. They were included as first generation participants because they felt they had strong enough memories and wished to take part in the project. Thus, the age ranges were used more as guide to the researcher when sourcing interviews and there was some level of flexibility. However, at all times ‘first generation’ is used to describe a contemporary witness, ‘second generation’ to describe their children, and ‘third generation’ to describe their grandchildren. The occupation, age at the time of interview, and, where relevant, the year of birth are included in the thesis at the first mention of each participant and, if it may be relevant to the argument being made, is also included at other points for reference. The interviewees have a right to be acknowledged as the authors of their own words and therefore on the copyright forms every participant completed they were asked if they wanted their names to be disclosed. All the interviewees who wanted their names disclosed have their real name used in the study; this does mean that in some of the family interviews two or three surnames are used for all the family members as some wanted to remain anonymous whilst others wished their name to be used. In total fifteen family interviews were conducted, twelve of these conducted over three generations and three conducted over two generations. The

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29 Two of the generational interviews were conducted with different strands of one family. This is the family given the pseudonym ‘Clark’ in the project. After interviewing the female contemporary witness, her daughter, and grandson, the male contemporary witness expressed an interest in being interviewed. He was thus interviewed with a different daughter as a second generation interviewee (there was no third generation member available for this family interview). Whilst some topics were discussed that overlapped with the initial interview, and the female first generation witness wished to join in with the family interview, the topics were also quite different in some instances as the male and female contemporary witnesses did not know each other during the war and had different experiences which were explored during the interview process.
interviews conducted over two generations were done so because in two of the cases there was not a third generation member to interview and in one case the second generation member was deceased so interviews were conducted with the first and third generation.

As well as families, group interviews of 4-8 people within each generation were conducted using photo stimuli to spark discussion. Nine group interviews were completed in total, with three group interviews from each of the three generations. Therefore, three group interviews were conducted with contemporary witnesses, three with groups of second generation members and three with groups of third generation members. In all instances the group members knew each other beforehand and were groups of friends who had volunteered to partake in an interview. Group interviews were performed to act as a test of the collective memory outside of the family, as was their role in the European studies. By using ‘natural’ or ‘social’ groups, these are groups of people who already know each other, such as friends, we can ensure the analysis of the narratives was not solely based on family bonds but is representative of a broader collective memory that either transcend or are specific to generations. The photos I am using can be found in the appendix of the thesis. The first five photos are the same as those used in research projects in the other seven European countries, and photo number six is one specific to this project. The photos have deliberately been chosen to not include iconic images so that the participants have to draw upon their own perceptions of what is visually represented when describing their opinions, emotions and beliefs about their observations. By doing this it was hoped that the comments of the interviewees would generate some interesting and common themes that could offer insights into the collective memory of World War II in England. The group interviews are initially based on the visual stimulus, the participants were asked to consider what
they believed was happening in the pictures, and then they continued to discuss more
general wartime themes, in the first instance what the participants wished to discuss,
and then some themes initiated by the interviewer.

In the individual interviews the contemporary witnesses were asked general
autobiographical questions about their experiences. This is the most common
methodological oral history approach and favoured because it allows the interviewee
scope to talk about what is important to them and the interviewer to pick out details
they feel need elaborating or further investigation. The parents and children in the
generational study were asked what stories relating to the past they knew about from
conversations within the family. In the family interviews after each participant had been
interviewed separately they would be interviewed as a family where the interviewer
would highlight some topics from the narratives to be discussed as a family. By doing
this the interaction between family members conversing about memories of the past
could be observed. As well as this, during all interviews I had a sheet of some of the
major instances of the war, particularly pertinent to the British experience, the topics
derived from work already done on British memory of World War II, which I used to
prompt the interviewees about things they may have remembered or experienced. 30
However, the interviews themselves were unstructured and open primarily to what the
interviewees wanted to discuss.

The interviews were conducted from 2007-10 in locations across England,
usually at the interviewee’s home. The use of friends, word of mouth, and official
groups representing those who may have a vested interest in being interviewed (such as
the British Legion) were used to find participants. Of these, the official groups proved a
less successful way of garnering interest than general word of mouth. Social networking

30 A copy of which is included in the Appendix.
sites were used and produced some interest, no doubt in part (much like word of mouth) due to the ‘legitimising’ effect this had on the project because a trusted friend had suggested it as opposed to a ‘stranger from the university’. Perhaps because of this there are areas, such as Coventry (my home city), and Leicester (where I live) that are represented disproportionately to other areas. However, the project is not limited to these areas and there are a significant number of interviews conducted elsewhere. As the nature of the research was not limited to a specific area of World War II or specific group of people (such as ex-servicemen) any family that wished to be interviewed with a first generation member that could sufficiently remember 1939-45 was included in the study. The hope was to gain a broad spectrum of people from and so including participants from a wide variety of backgrounds was encouraged. The two Jewish families in the study are from an attempt early on in the project to conduct a study into British Jewry’s wartime experiences, specifically concerning Holocaust memory. This did not prove feasible because gaining enough Jewish families for the project proved difficult. However, the interest from these families in conducting an interview was still taken up when the project altered its boundaries to be more inclusive of all wartime experiences, not just those relating to the Holocaust. There was also an interview conducted on Jersey, in the Channel Islands, with the hope of promoting the project further there and studying a collective memory from British citizens under occupation. However, once more this proved logistically difficult to promote and generate interest and so that interview is not used in this thesis.

There are, naturally, difficulties in conducting oral history projects such as these that lead to limitations in its overall scope. As Jensen has commented ‘Due to the time and labour intensive interviewing, transcription, and analysing process, only small numbers of interviews can be conducted, especially by individual researchers.
Moreover, samples are self-selective: only people who are willing (or able) to talk can be interviewed, and studies often have a regional or local focus with regard to general conclusions.31 Often, historians dealing only with documented evidence have a limited amount of sources to draw from and make their conclusions. Oral historians leave themselves open to the accusation that they propose their findings whilst perhaps many potential sources remain without consultation. However, despite the researcher’s best efforts some interviewees decline interviews or simply are not forthcoming to appeals to take part. Furthermore, a project such as this could be accused of being incomplete by not having a larger sample size, yet one has to prevent the project running *ad infinitum*. For instance, the project could interview every available family in England—however this is obviously impractical. Griffin suggests as a guideline that ‘In the context of a PhD…unstructured interviews may include between twenty and forty interviews’.32 Whilst this study contains more actual interviews than Griffin suggests, the interviews I am using are not as long as the average time she suggested for an interview (90 minutes) because often the second and third generations have much less to say about wartime than the first generation who directly remember events. Indeed, a total of 12 hours, 6 minutes and 11 seconds were recorded for the first generation with an average interview length of 48 minutes and 24 seconds. However, for the second and third generations the total interview times were 7 hours 59 minutes and 51 seconds and 4 hours 39 minutes and 22 seconds with average interview times of 34 minutes and 16 seconds and 21 minutes and 29 seconds respectively. This demonstrates, as would be expected, a decrease in knowledge about the Second World War as we interview people further removed from the event. The lengths of second and third generation interviews

were also directly related to that of the first generation. For instance, when the first generation member spoke for less than 40 minutes all of the second and third generation interviews were below average, the second generation interviews all being between 14 and 29 minutes, and the third generation interviews being between 6 and 10 minutes. Conversely, when the first generation member spoke for over an hour almost all of the second and third generation interviews were above average in length. The second generation interviews being between 37 and 39 minutes, and, despite one of the third generation interviews being 20 minutes the other two were 29 and 38 minutes long. This correlation would seem to indicate that there is a direct link between the amount of memories that the first generation may share in an interview setting and that which they share within the family. However, in total 41 hours, 18 minutes and 24 seconds of interview time was collected and analysed for this project- putting it comfortably within the total amount of material Griffin suggests for a study of this nature. In total 95 people were interviewed in this project including all family and group interviews.

The Demography of the Interviewees

A selection of key demographic details of the interviewees for all 96 participants who took part in the interviews is displayed below:

**Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see there is a bias towards females in all three generations of the study, this was not intentional but simply what occurred from the volunteers available for
We can account for this in the first generation by the fact that over the age of 70 females in Britain begin to outnumber males. The Office of National Statistics records that in mid-2009 the ‘ratio of females to males increases progressively from 1.1 at age 70, to 2.1 by the age of 89’, and that this ‘reflects the higher life expectancy of women at older ages and higher male mortality during the Second World War’. Thus, there were more women available to be interviewed in this age group and this accounts for the larger difference between male and female participants compared to the subsequent generations which are much closer in numbers.

Education and occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>1st Generation</th>
<th>2nd Generation</th>
<th>3rd Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/ Current Undergraduate (%)</td>
<td>8% (3/34)</td>
<td>19% (6/33)</td>
<td>89% (25/29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Collar (Managerial)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Collar (Manual/ does not supervise any other workers)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows firstly the percentages of participants in each generation who have been educated to university level or were undergraduates at the time of the interview.

33 In the case of first generation males two of those interviews were also single interviews where there were no subsequent generations to interview. They have been included in this intergenerational study not only to add more gender balance to first generation witnesses but also because of their testimony. They provided vivid examples of the London Blitz and witnessing Bergen-Belsen concentration camp from a British soldier’s perspective. When used in the study they are as examples of first generation memory only, in much the same way some of the comments in the group interviews have been used, to demonstrate how events are represented within generations.

The second part of the table is a breakdown of the interviewees by current occupation. Percentages were used in education to demonstrate that the younger generations were more likely to have attended, or currently be attending university, as a proportion of the overall number of people interviewed in each generation. This rather reflects the changing situation in British society throughout the twentieth century. However, the exact number of university educated participants compared to the overall number of interviewees in each generation is included in brackets. Furthermore, the high instance of white-collar workers in the second generation reflects their position in the managerial positions of post-war and post-industrial society. Finally, the decline of the category ‘Housewife’ over the three generations no doubt reflects the changing attitudes to women in the workplace since 1945.

### Ages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 and above</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The age of the interviewee is representative of the age they were at the time the interview took place. The age ranges are fairly evenly spaced out with high numbers
around the 50-59 and 20-29 age ranges occurring in the second and third generations because many of the participants of the group interviews happened to fall into these categories.

**Analysis of the Interviews**

The interviews were studied using Hermeneutic textual analysis. This will standardise the analysis with the way the interviews were looked at in the European studies. The Hermeneutic theory is based on the principle that each individual brings their own particular interpretation to an individual source. Indeed, the hermeneutic school argues that no reading is free of interpretation. This requires that we analyse the sources from many different levels, from what was actually said by the interviewee; how it was spoken; and what other factors, internal and external to the interviewee, may have played a role in constructing the narrative. The study also has links to discourse analysis which is concerned with studying how language, written or spoken, is actually used by people. In Griffin’s explanation discourse analysis is different from textual analysis in that it assumes from the outset that language is *invested*, meaning that language is not a neutral tool for transmitting a message, but rather that all “communication events”... constitute a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world). Thus, this would further develop the contention that all descriptions of events are biased in some way depending on the narrator’s worldview. However, when considering the work done on collective memory we could also contend that there are collective narrations where many people exhibit very similar discourses within descriptions of a past event. Whilst this study will look at the individual phasing of certain aspects of the interviews, and this is a part of the

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35 Griffin, ‘Discourse Analysis’, p.91.
Hermeneutic analysis also, it is the broader descriptions of the past that this study is also concerned with and the extent to which there is evidence of genuine collective agreement over certain aspects concerned with the Second World War.

The interviews have tried to be analysed with a high level of context for how the interviewees are remembering the Second World War. This has included analysing aspects from popular culture, such as films, books and commemorative events, and influences from the British educational system. However, this is not always an exact process and we should be cautious against imposing a high level of certainty on what exactly has influenced individual participants. For instance, before the government implementation of the National Curriculum and Education Reform Act in 1988 what students studied in History in schools was highly eclectic. Even from the 1990s onwards the level of education a student received in World War II and the Holocaust could depend on what particular exam board the school was following. Similarly, it is difficult to definitively ascertain what cultural or commemorative experiences have shaped an individual’s perception of the past unless they explicitly comment upon them. However, evidence from popular culture can be used to offer suggestions for certain prevailing perceptions. In this sense evidence has been used such as propaganda films of the war years; the militaristic films of the late 1940s and 1950s; the rise of Holocaust awareness from the 1980s; and the increased focus on the Home Front post-1995. This included national recognition for war workers, which had been exclusive to military personnel, such as Monument to the Women of World War II, unveiled in London in 2005 and commissioned to honour the work of women in Britain during World War II. This type of contextual evidence has been used where appropriate to provide further information and conclusions and arguments have been forwarded where applicable.
All the interviews have been transcribed and were analysed using the NVivo qualitative analysis software. NVivo is an organising tool that allows the researcher to categorise topics within the programme to aid their analysis.36 Middleton and Edwards have noted that by using a transcription compared to the conversational interview the written version became a neat, concise story as opposed to the more manic improvisation of the conversation.37 This is worth bearing in mind and I have tried to keep the essence of the oral conversation by using certain markers in my transcriptions. This includes using a ‘/’ in the transcription where a speaker gets interrupted or even stops themselves part way through a sentence to alter what they were saying. Also, a ‘#’ sign is used in the transcriptions to denote a point at which the next person to speak talks at the same time as the person already speaking. There are advantages to using the transcription in analysis, as Jensen notes ‘researchers can work with the text in their own time, not in the “real time” of the recording, they can easily flip back and forth through pages, they can instantly make notes, and they can easily present important passages in teaching or publications’.38 However, this is not the oral source and so I have been conscious to return to the oral recording to clarify my arguments on certain points and to use these as much as possible, although to a certain extent the written transcriptions have provided the basis for the analysis of the interviews. Silverman highlights how the full transcript is often never available for the reader to formulate their own opinions, and also therefore whether the researcher has selected only the portions of data that support their argument.39 In this instance it is worth highlighting that the full transcripts of all the interviews are to be kept by the Stanley Burton Centre,

36 NVivo does not do the analysing, that is still the researcher’s responsibility.
39 Silverman, Interpreting Qualitative Data, pp.46-52.
University of Leicester, and will be available for academic consultation and research purposes.40

Ultimately, the interpretations are my own, derived from careful consideration of the source material taking into account external factors that may have influenced the participants’ narratives. However, before the analysis began I worked on an exploratory case study on one of the interviews with Dr Olaf Jensen and an MA student also working in this area. We took one set of family interviews and worked through them over several weeks where we discussed meanings behind the narratives. In doing this we were developing horizons of interpretation over the source material through discussions about our individual understanding. We drew from Glaser and Strauss’s ideas of ‘Theoretical Sampling’ where they suggest on a collective analysis to develop theories for texts as they emerge thus developing confidence in the categories.41 These sessions were used to aid my individual interpretations and help develop sensitivity for the material. Some general themes for interpretation were developed in these sessions, such as a lack of victimisation and the use of humour by the interviews to describe loss, which reoccurred in others narratives and were used as categories for analysis. Furthermore, although there were broad topics that I mentioned to prompt memories during the interviews, I derived the arguments and analysis from what was discussed by the interviewees rather than the pre-existing theories.

The topics chosen from the analysis for the final content was done so for different reasons. In the first instance topics were chosen because of their popularity and frequency that they were commented upon by the interviewees. For instance, if we take rationing as an example then I have recorded it being mentioned on 174 separate occasions within the interviews on the NVivo software. However, these are not all

40 This would be via negotiation and appointment with the director.
grouped together as different participants discussed it for different reasons. Therefore, sub-groups were created such as ‘not complaining about rationing’ (referenced on 20 occasions), ‘digging for victory’ (referenced on 14 occasions), or ‘admitting to small scale black market activity and bending of the rules’ (referenced on 35 occasions), amongst others. These individual sub-groups would offer us further insight into the abstract topics in the first part of the thesis. For instance, ‘not complaining about rationing’ was used to demonstrate how interviewees narrated an element of the sacrifice they experienced to help the country during World War II; and promoting how growing their own vegetables in ‘digging for victory’ revealed an area showing how the British people pulled together and helped themselves in ‘Unity’. However, the large amount of instances where people confessed to getting more than they were entitled to was used to show that rationing was also an area where everyone did not necessarily follow the metanarrative of ‘Unity’ and openly discussed unfairly gaining extra rations.

This leads us to the second area where topics were chosen for discussion from the interviews. Certain narratives that were revealing because of their disagreement with established theories on British collective memory of World War II, even if not great in number, were included to show the marginalised memories that were present within the interviews. For instance, in the first chapter, ‘Defiance’, only two of the interviewees expressed genuine terror and fear towards being a civilian in a bombing raid. However, because this version of how bombing raids are often framed in the British memory, to quote the oft used Ministry of Information film- Britain Can Take It, their stark confessions of literally not being able to take it are important for reflection. There are also areas where the marginalised voices are more numerous. Indeed, when voicing attitudes towards the Japanese conduct during the Second World War we shall also see how the treatment of British POWs is an issue that still provokes an emotional
reaction from a significant number of the participants. This naturally means that not
everything that was classified as a topic in the NVivo analysis process has been
discussed in the following chapters. However, I believe the main and most interesting
areas have been included that will help us learn more about the memory of the Second
World War and Holocaust within England.
This chapter addresses the ‘defiant’ attitude expressed in the interview narratives concerning Britain’s approach to the war during 1939-45. In this section the examples are solely drawn from discussions involving the war in the air and the Blitz. This most characterises the defiant spirit within the British people. As Connelly has pointed out the Blitz provides the British with evidence of their national character as they stood together to withstand the full force of the German bombing campaign. Various scholarly sources have highlighted a defiant attitude, promoted by British propaganda during the war years. For instance, the British documentary films of the period promoted stoical Britons enduring wartime deprivations and German bombardment, as Chapman has shown us. This can be seen in propaganda films such as Ordinary People (1941) that depicts innocent civilians dealing calmly with the bombing whilst keeping their spirits up without any hint of defeatism or capitulation. Wartime propaganda was naturally much more complicated than this and, as Crawford points out, the Ministry of Information propaganda focussed upon many ‘claimed British characteristics such as toughness, moral courage, heroic collectivism, duty, emotional restraint, caricatured as the “stiff upper lip”, and a sense of humour.’ These elements overlap and can be found, at least partly, in some of the examples I use from the interviews in the initial four chapters. However, by breaking them down into these

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1 M. Connelly, We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War, (Harlow, 2004), p.129.
3 ‘Ordinary People’ (1941), in Land of Promise. The British Documentary Movement 1930-1950, British Film Institute.
four sections I believe we can better analyse the role each section plays in the British memory of the Second World War. It is also true that because these elements are so prominent in the secondary literature we must acknowledge that during analysis there may have been preconceptions that encouraged categorising the interviews along these lines. To what extent the reader agrees with the interpretation of the sources is open to debate; however, at all times the analysis shall try to bear this concern in mind. Initially in this chapter we are going to look at some areas of general defiance and how they are described by the participants; we will then examine how humour was used as a device to avoid confronting traumatic issues; and finally there is a discussion concerning examples of fear in the narratives and hints that personal recollections do not always conform to defiant attitudes.

General Defiant Attitudes

This was a popular topic amongst the interviewees and in the analysis of the interviews, under the heading ‘defiance to bombing’, this was mentioned in eighteen separate interviews and twenty nine references to it were recorded. A belligerent defiance to individual safety was a popular sub-category and recorded in eleven of the examples from nine interviews. In the example below first generation member Jenny Smith, a retired housewife aged 87 and born in 1919, describes how she used to take her brother down to the shelter during air raids but her mother would never join them, choosing instead to remain outside doing household chores, in this example beating her rug clean on the washing line:

I used to take Peter down into the air shelter but my mother would never go down and I’d say to her ‘oh do come down mum’ I said ‘I have to go down because of Peter’, ‘oh no’ she said ‘they won’t hurt me’ and she had great faith and she didn’t, she’d be up there with her rug or carpet on the line, beating it...
with her carpet beater, and the planes would be over and fighting and everything.\(^5\)

The fact that her mother was prepared to stay in the garden to clean her rugs as the bombers came over can be argued as indicative of the boldness in the face of overwhelming odds that the British would like to portray. In this example Jenny highlights the fact that her mother had ‘great faith’ that she would not be harmed. We can presume, as it is not mentioned elsewhere in the interview, that she was not injured during the war and therefore from a position of hindsight her mother’s belief seems somehow prophetic and an example to be admired. We can infer there is the underlying suggestion that, had people not had faith and belligerently defied the bombs, then the ability of the British people to withstand air attack would have been greatly diminished. This is further emphasised when we consider what Jenny’s mother was doing when the bombs fell - she was cleaning her carpet. Not a task necessarily essential to the war effort, but one of dignity - maintaining a clean house even in the midst of war, or to put it another way - maintaining the standard of life to which she was accustomed to.

It is worth noting that a version of this story appears in the narratives of the two subsequent generations. Second generation member Shirley Wilkinson, aged 69, commented that her mother ‘used to run down the shelter with my brother, and my nan would be out there batting the rugs when they came over [laughing]. Mum used to say ‘mum will you come?’ ‘No, they won’t bomb me’, she used to say! [laughter]\(^6\) Third generation member Steve Wilkinson, a transport manager aged 36, also recalls hearing about his great grandmother ‘batting the hell out of a rug and wouldn’t come indoors and won’t do nothing. That’s again, yeah you can see her doing that’\(^7\) Although we can see a thinning of the details of the story as it passes through the generations the key

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\(^5\) First Generation [hereafter FG] Jenny Smith, Great Britain [hereafter GB], Interviewer Alex Libby [hereafter AL], 22.04.07, lines 190-195.


\(^7\) Third Generation [hereafter TG] Steve Wilkinson, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 129-130.
elements of the narrative remain. All three generations focus on the theme of wilful defiance and there is the belief present that she will not come to any harm and the specific knowledge from Steve that she was working hard ‘batting the hell out of a rug’ rather than neglecting that task to take shelter. Indeed, Steve takes this a step further and sees the characteristics displayed from the incident as a positive family trait as he comments about the ‘resilience, gritty determination, and then again you can see where you get it from in your own mannerisms…obviously my nan has picked up on what my great nan did and vice versa I have as well.’

Steve goes on to comment after this that ‘It does travel through you… Actual stories… I think they’re the ones that have always stuck in my mind.’ Steve tells us that he has remembered being told ‘stories’ such as these within his family. Many of the first generation interviewees remembered their experiences in ‘snippets’ of information relayed to the interviewer, where memories and instances promoted other thoughts, rather than as a chronological monologue. This is a perfectly natural way to remember and within the Smith/ Wilkinson/ Hartley family Steve has listened to and remembered these stories, or snippets of memory, being relayed to him. Steve appears to have used what his great grandmother did as a significant instance in how he sees himself through his heritage and presumably therefore, how he would like to see himself responding should he ever be in a similar situation. Morgan and Evans argue that ‘from the early years of the war… there was recognition of the heroism of everyone who faced the devastating conditions of modern war. This extended to the civilian urban population who were daily exposed to air attacks.’

Furthermore, they suggest that ‘once courage had become de-militarised and hence, to a certain extent, de-mythologised, it was found amongst people of all walks of life.’

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8 Ibid., 137-141.
9 Ibid., 143-148.
Therefore, anyone who withstood air attack felt an entitlement to be characterised as heroic (not that this is necessarily unreasonable) and this is obviously a trait that many would want to highlight in family memory.

The idea briefly explored above that people would carry on with whatever they were doing when the sirens sounded was not an uncommon narrative and occurred in other interviews. For instance, first generation member Joan Dyer, a housewife aged 83 and born in 1924, recalls an instance in the cinema:

JD. When it was a/ I know we went to the cinema, because if you went to the cinema and the sirens went, you had a big thing on the screen: ‘If you want to leave, would you please leave quietly’ and make no noise and the rest stayed that want to stay. But when you heard any whistling or anything you thought a bang you’d dive down on any of the seats. There was no/ that’s what we used to do you see.
TM. Did many leave? Or did many stay?
JD. Some went, it got to a point where you thought ‘oh well, if it will be, it will be’ and you’d stop, but some of them went, some got out but they left quietly. But a lot of them stopped in

These examples are similar to the example from Jenny Smith in that although they were not doing anything pertinent to the war effort they still felt that they should continue with their lives despite the sirens. In her recollections Joan Dyer remembers some leaving but this is not her focus, she instead emphasises the fact that ‘a lot of them stopped’ and how you would dive down behind the seats and hope for the best if a bomb was heard. It is worth us focussing on this because of the effort the British government at the time put into promoting the fact that the nation must carry on despite the Blitz and is still emphasised now. In the propaganda short film Ordinary People (1941) when the siren is heard during a court case the judge continues the proceedings; only when the ‘spotter’ indicates the planes are directly overhead do the people move to

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11 Ibid.
12 FG Joan Dyer, GB, Interviewer Thomas McKay [hereafter TM], 5.6.08, lines 143-151.
the basement and even then the case continues whilst they shelter from the bombs. It portrays a powerful picture that Britain will not be broken by the threat of bombers because, although people will take precautions as necessary, they will do it calmly and will continue their lives around the threat of air attack without neglecting their duties. In 1940 the Chief Inspector of Factories noted that production was being hit by the length of time workers were spending in shelters when no actual air raid was overhead. Thus over the summer of 1940 the government negotiated with trade unions and business to create a policy whereby workers would only take shelter when spotters on the roof confirmed enemy planes overhead; by October 1940 this policy was in widespread use. However, an initiative like this coming from central government does not highlight the stoicism of the ordinary civilian and so this is less emphasised in memory. In *Ordinary People* there is never any hysteria, in a different scene a taxi driver hears the air raid siren but continues his journey and his only response is to don a tin hat as he looks to the sky ruefully. The message then, that appears to still be promoted now, is of the population not being forced to cower from German bombs but continuing to maintain a sense of normality to their lives. It is also in the education system that this view prevails. Crawford shows us that modern British school textbooks ‘provide evidence suggesting that people “carried on” out of courage and fortitude’ yet he argues that whilst ‘some clearly did many more carried on because there was no choice’.

Remarks by the interviewees also suggest an element of fatalism surrounding their own safety was present in order to adequately cope and continue with their everyday lives, this was recorded in eight examples from five interviews. First generation witness Beth Clark, a retired waitress and housewife aged 73 and born in

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13 ‘Ordinary People’ (1941), *Land of Promise*.  
15 Ibid.  
1933, commented about going to the communal shelters that ‘people got so fed up of making it a ritual every night to have to go down there and go at seven o’clock to get a seat. And then at the end people began to think “well if I’m going to get killed I’m going to get killed I’m stopping where I am”, you know.’ This demonstrates the highest level of defiance that care for one’s own personal safety was in the end ignored as people preferred to accept they may die rather than take necessary precautions. It is also evidence of a lack of victimisation that can be inferred from many of the narratives concerning bombing. Although the wide focus of the interview structure and inability to concentrate on interviewees’ emotions and feelings over several meetings could also have contributed to this. A similar comment to Beth’s is made by her grandson Tim, a university student aged 19, who imagines that ‘they knew if they stayed in the cities there was a threat of being bombed and I think most people would probably look at it as if it’s my time to go, it’s my time to go.’ This is remarkably similar to Beth’s statement yet elsewhere in the interview Tim admits that his grandmother has ‘never really spoken about [the war]’ and that ‘I get most of my information on the war from, what I say GCSE history, but films, media as well, film, war films especially.’ Tim has clearly done some work on World War II at school at would have been in the age range where the curriculum required some study of twentieth century conflict. We could conclude from his comments that the fatalistic opinions above, although similar, are completely independent of each other - one being Beth’s recollections and the other influenced by Tim’s education and the films he has watched. This may be true however, at the very beginning of his interview Tim does mention that although Beth ‘hasn’t really told me any stories’ there was ‘one where she was in Aunty Joan’s house, and a

17 FG Beth Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 83-86.
18 TG Tim Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 91-93.
19 Ibid., 14-15.
20 Ibid., 174-175.
lot of bombing, they used to spend a lot of time in the cellar.¹²¹ This does not contain a
great amount of detail like many third generation examples, but it does demonstrate
Tim hearing a story about staying at home in the cellar rather than go to the communal
shelter. We can never be sure but it is possible that during this story Beth may also have
highlighted a fatalistic attitude that would supplement her grandson’s opinions about
attitudes to being bombed. An emphasis upon the heroic element of the British people
to withstand the Blitz could relegate the issue of death and victimhood to a minority
part of the British bombing experience. This would also downgrade the memory of the
value people placed on their own personal safety. This of course makes the British
people appear even more heroically defiant to suggest that even the prospect of death
had to be accepted so that they could continue to function as a country. The above
examples begin to offer some evidence for this trait in memory.

In looking at the idea of a defiant attitude it was noticed that there were
narratives that demonstrated a casual approach to what the British people had to endure,
nine references from eight interviews described defiance in this manner. This is the case
when first generation member Frieda Reid, retired factory worker and housewife aged
84 and born 1925, recalls that ‘by the time we got to work sometimes the sirens used to
go so we’d get it both ends.’²² She is describing how they used to have to shelter from
bombs at home and then at work in the factories on some occasions. The point of the
comment is subtle but it can be argued that by emphasising what they had to endure the
implication is that their defiance should be recognised for doing so. This can be further
shown if we look at an example from a second generation group interview. This was a
group of six friends between the ages of 43-67 and they were born between 1942 and
1966, the interview was conducted at a group member’s home. Here Barbara Pigg, a

²¹ Ibid., 9-11.
²² FG Frieda Reid, GB, TM, 20.2.09, lines 42-43.
retired catering assistant, recalls a family memory about her mother and states that ‘my mum, when me dad was away, sitting under the stairs, used to go and sit under the stairs at home. All on your own [incomprehensible], no electricity, candle to take you to bed, oh my God, it must have been awful.’ In the later generations the stoicism from the first generations’ narratives is less overt such as here where Barbara lists some of the hardships such as ‘no electricity’ and then comments how ‘it must have been awful’. However, when further questioned about this by the interviewer (TM) Barbara (BP) chooses not to dwell on this story:

TM. But do you remember being told about it though?
BP. Yeah/
AG. Yeah, a little bit.
BP. We had washhouses outside, because we didn't have luxuries like that in the house so/
MW. [Incomprehensible]
BP. In our house where me and Billy lived, in Albion Street. Do you remember Billy Albion Street?
BS. I set the washhouses on fire didn't I, yeah of course I remember it.
BP. We used to have, we used to have a boiler to do your boiling, there were four houses and we had one each and they got bombed up, they got blew up, outside toilet.
MW. That was close then wasn't it?
BP. Oh yeah.
AG. We had one/
BP. It was #really close.24

Barbara knows about her mother’s hardships during the war and instead recalls a different story about having ‘washhouses’ outside and these getting bombed also during the Blitz. The group then continues to talk about that and how it was ‘close’ when the outside toilets were bombed. However, this is also not concentrated on as Barbara’s husband, Alfie, a retired engineer, points out that in the street near where he lived ‘there was somebody killed in there. I mean I can't remember it I was only told about it’. However, once more this is not focussed upon or picked up by the group and the

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23 Group Discussion [hereafter GD], SG, GB, TM, 4.10.09, lines 580-582.
24 Ibid., 584-598.
25 Ibid., 603-604.
conversation again moves on to discuss the less emotive topic of the dates where bombing occurred. It is difficult to capture the essence of the conversation here without reprinting sections from the original interview that would be considered inappropriately too long. However, the point here is that in the analysis it was felt that whenever a troubling incident was mentioned it was used only to make a factual comment on what was overcome rather than as an incident to dwell upon. Therefore, rather than focus on victimisation this would subtly emphasise the positive character of those who carried on under these circumstances. However, we should caution against imposing this interpretation too strongly as it is also possible that it is born out of an attempt to analyse the interviews against work already conducted in this area, which does highlight the defiance of the British people. These attitudes could have been from the fact that interviewees were bored with the interview; or that they did not feel comfortable expressing high levels of emotion to an interviewer or within a group of their peers. In the group interview used as an example here it is possible that they had little more to say on each subject that they brought up and were then moving onto other topics to have something to say to the interviewer. However, it did appear a significant number of interviewees across generations adopted a general defiant attitude to bombing, which included a desire to avoid sensitive subjects that could contradict this.

Humour

During the interviews a popular technique emerged when the interviewees were discussing potentially traumatic situations and this was the use of humour. Humorous situations were recorded in twenty interviews, and thirty references within these interviews, when discussing the Blitz alone. Twenty-two of these references were from the first generation, an indicator that humour was being used as an alternative to
expressing more distressing emotions associated with tragedy. Despite the bias towards women in the first generation in this study it is also interesting that twelve of the twenty-two references came from male participants. This would seem to enforce the idea that humour was used to supplement other emotions; I propose that the traditional masculine role as protector was compromised during the Blitz and therefore humour was needed to make sense and describe what was experienced. Two types of humour were identified as sub-categories within humour and these were the more subtle ironic humour and the more obvious general funny story. Both types of humour appear to play a role in relieving tension in what otherwise could have become emotional or poignant narratives.

The two examples below demonstrate two separate occasions where the participants discuss civilian deaths from bombing occurring because of direct hits on shelters. First generation Maureen Nicholls, a retired shop assistant and housewife aged 81 and born 1926, described ‘the aeroplane works which was just up the road really from here, that had a heavy bombing. But there were a lot of people killed because the bomb hit the shelter. If they'd all been in the factory they’d have been all right but they were all in the shelter.’\[26\] Also, third generation member James Burdekin, a 19 year old law student, in a third generation group interview conducted in a meeting room at a Halls of Residence, the group comprising of six university students all aged 18-20 and born between 1987-88, recalled:

My Gran said that when Sheffield was bombed in the Second World War they bombed all the row of sort of shelters, so the houses were all not damaged and the shelters were all blown up. So all the people in the shelters all died, obviously they can’t take direct hits from bombs. So if they’d have been in the house they’d have been all right. [laughs]\[27\]

\[26\] FG Maureen Nicholls, GB, TM, 18.6.08, lines 318-321.
\[27\] GD, TG, GB, TM, 19.3.07, lines 435-439.
These very similar narratives display an element of ironic humour because of the fact that by sheltering from the bombing the people in the story were killed rather than aiding their safety. This can be linked to the fatalism that we were discussing above that there was a feeling that sometimes you could do nothing to ensure your safety and had to rely on an element of fate to prevent injury or death. However, the use of this ironic humour is also a tactic in avoiding talking about the tragic human loss from both experiences. In both these narratives it is the ironic situation, rather than the people, that is focussed upon and we again have to highlight the lack of victim status in the memory of how these instances are described. We should also note that the similarity of the narratives comes from two participants who were from different areas of England and who have never met, one a first generation witness from Bristol, the other a third generation participant who recalled the story being told to him from his grandmother where the family was from Sheffield. This was actually the only story James could remember from his grandparents and this could be simply that the war was not discussed a lot at home. However, it is interesting that the only family memory he has is of what could be a quite sad or distressing incident remembered in an amusing way, albeit tragic-humour.

As was mentioned there was also the more general funny story that was used by participants when talking about the Blitz experience. First generation witness Paul Clark, aged 79 and born 1929, a retired car factory worker, described sheltering and commented that ‘we use to get in the coalhouse, what was the coalhouse… me dad he was quite nervous and I’d go siiiii [makes sound of bomb dropping] and he’d be on the door handle “Hold on here!” “You little bugger you!” [laughter]. But to an extent he was always sick when, he’d throw up and he was all right then, but there again I just
thought fun time [more laughter]. Here Paul describes making the sound of dropping bombs because he found it amusing that his dad would hold onto the shelter door. There is an element here where we glimpse an element of fear when Paul comments that his father ‘was always sick’ but this is only briefly dealt with as he then goes on to say how his father would then feel better and he could return to having fun, he does not perceive the war situation as a serious occurrence in hindsight. Of course we must also bear in mind here that Paul would have been an adolescent during the war and his memories here slip back into his frame of mind at that time. Indeed, at the very beginning of his interview Paul had already commented that at the start of the war ‘I was 9 or 10 years old; to me it was just excitement, it was just a fun thing’. Paul (PC) also described this story in the family discussion with his daughter Sara (SC):

PC. Right in the middle you know. And zum, zum, zum [noise of the planes] coming at him. I thought now [whistling noise]. He said “Arrh there’s another one!” He found it was me ooh he give me a bloody belting. “It’s not fun this war ain’t fun”, but it was a joke to me.

SC. You should talk more about it Dad, it’s well entertaining [laughter]

In this example again the role of Paul’s father is reduced to being a part of the comedy element of Paul’s story rather than a focus upon his feelings and why he was so angry with Paul for trying to scare him with the bomb noises. We see her how his daughter, Sara, aged 48 and born 1961, an administrator, also encourages him to talk more about these situations because they are ‘entertaining’, she does not question how the father felt about this and why they were not more fearful. In this sense the context is determined by the first generation’s focus; because he tells it in an amusing fashion that is what the second generation member wishes to centre on, the more childlike memory.

However, in her interview Sara noted that her father ‘doesn’t talk an awful lot about the war, strangely enough. I think you have to ask Dad a direct question, whereas Mum

28 FG Paul Clark, GB, TM, 25.1.09, lines 67-72.
29 Ibid., 11-12.
Thus, her telling her father to ‘talk more about it’ can be seen as an indication of her enjoyment about learning her fathers’ memories such as this and wishing to hear more like it. In this sense we should also be wary that Sara may have wanted to interject but did not want to break the flow of Paul’s story or prevent him from mentioning other memories in the future because she had offered a sceptical repost. Jeffery Richards maintains that every wartime film included three qualities deemed central to the British national character: sense of humour, tolerance, and stoicism or emotional restraint. As we have seen humour plays an important role alongside defiance in the memory of the Blitz. It is an effective way to ease the tension of certain situations and changes the focus of what has the potential to be emotional memories to being light-hearted and reinforces the belief that the British people never lost their resolve to withstand the Luftwaffe because they maintained their good humour throughout.

**Fear and Defiance**

We discussed how, in the above examples, the element of fear was glossed over in preference to highlighting the humour in the participants’ narratives. It is worth looking further at this idea that there is an element of fear in some of the stories and how this can be downplayed in favour of the collective metanarrative of defiance. This category of a narrative containing a hint of fear but only mentioned briefly before switching the focus of the narrative was recorded in fourteen interviews and referenced twenty two times within those interviews. It should be noted that, as opposed to humour, there is only one male first generation reference to fear compared to twelve female first generation references. The greater number of male references in the humour

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31 SG Sara Clark, GB, TM, 21.05.09, lines 21-22.

section supports what was mentioned before about the male need to explain their experiences without compromising the masculine desire not to show fear. In the example below first generation witness Mary Pole, aged 28 and born 1929, a retired solderer, describes sheltering from bombs under the stairs:

> it upsets me a wee bit, you know as you could associate/ I mean they/ we had what we called a bogey hole in our house, it was under the stairs. Mum and Dad used to stick us kids ’cause there was… just me and my sister then, the two of us and they used to stick us under the stairs, the bogey hole as they called it. On that night in November, it was exactly the same you know as what my Mum and Dad used to do, me Mum used to be there with us. But we thought then that because me Mum used to feed us/ she managed to get us some biscuits, you know, it was great, it was a treat to go under the stairs and have a picnic, sort of thing.\(^{33}\)

Here Mary begins by admitting that it ‘upsets’ her, whether she means that it upset her at the time, upsets her now, or both is not made explicitly clear in her narrative. Mary is from Coventry and the night in November she is referring to is the Moonlight Sonata raid on the city in November 1940 which was Coventry’s heaviest raid of the war and approximately 600 people lost their lives. However, rather than elaborating on the upset she mentioned at the beginning of the extract the focus switches to the fact that her mother managed to procure some biscuits and the memory emphasised is how much of a ‘treat’ it was to have a picnic under the stairs. Although the overall tone of the narrative would therefore seem a positive memory, and about remaining cheerful and upbeat however bad the circumstances became, we should also bear in mind that here Mary’s recollections are how she is remembering them as a child, much like Paul before she would have been a young adolescent at this point and this is how she remembers it, not as an adult would.

In another example first generation witness Frieda Reid, a retired housewife, remembered that ‘at night we used to come home and have our tea and if it happened to

\(^{33}\) FG Mary Pole, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 135-143.
be a lovely night the sirens used to go, down the shelter we used to go, so we didn't/ I think your nerves you know tell on you quite a bit, well it's bound to isn't it.\textsuperscript{34} Similar to Mary’s ‘upset’ comment, here we see briefly from Frieda how it affected her ‘nerves’. However, in this instance she seeks reassurance from the interviewer by suggesting that ‘it’s bound to’ inviting him to agree with her and support her that her reaction was appropriate. This could be simply a conversational quirk and a natural way to attempt a connection in the interview. However, this was not often the case when the interviewees were discussing their own memories, and we could argue here that she feels the need to seek this assurance because of the British metanarrative that highlights the fact that the British people could take whatever was thrown at them during the Blitz and her sign of perceived weakness did not fit in with that. I would argue that these examples can show evidence of how, when discussing a moment of potential fear, the narratives avoid that because that would not show a defiant attitude. However, this is perhaps what we expected to find to corroborate the work already done in the area and this may have had an influence on the analysis.

It is interesting that only nine of the twenty-two references referring to fear without being explicit were from the second or third generations. Though, if we accept the argument above that this was not a point of the memory that the first generation wished to focus upon then it is perhaps not surprising that this element would decay through the generations. One such example came from third generation member Dominic Rye, aged 20, a student and grandson of Mary Pole who was mentioned earlier, who commented about a play he had seen that ‘I went during the matinee so it was most of the older people there and I'm looking around thinking this is so specific, all these people did this first hand you know. And there was a lot of people genuinely

\textsuperscript{34} FG Frieda Reid, GB, TM, 20.2.09, lines 44-46.
upset, you know you had the [makes whistling sound like dropping bomb] and I'd never thought of it in that respect, you know that these are just ordinary people.\textsuperscript{35} This is despite that fact that at the beginning of his interview Dominic states that his grandmother had ‘talked about [the war] a lot, it's mostly to do with the blitz because obviously living in Coventry that's pretty much everyone's memory’.\textsuperscript{36} Yet the first excerpt shows how Dominic was surprised by how upset the older generation had become during the performance of the Blitz play he went to see. His comments that he never thought of them as ‘ordinary people’ is interesting because it would indicate that he thought of Britain’s wartime population as somehow without the emotional weakness’ of later generations because he had never seen this ‘genuinely upset’ side to Britain’s war memory he witnessed at the play.\textsuperscript{37} This example strengthens the argument that when the fear factor is only subtly mentioned in the first generation account, then it does not, on the whole, manifest itself at all in the later generations.

In some of the narratives the fear element is hinted at even further and manifests itself in the description of the noises people experienced during the Blitz. Thirteen references in eleven of the interviews mentioned the distressing noises that were associated with bombing. Only two of these references are not from the first generation, one coming from a second generation member who could remember being told about hearing guns fired and the other from Dominic Rye who was discussing the noises associated with seeing the play he mentioned above rather than any inherited knowledge. This is evidence of the decay of some of the sensory memories associated with war as it is recalled by family members who were not contemporary witnesses; this detail of the sounds associated with conflict is very often not a part of inherited

\textsuperscript{35} TG, Dominic Rye, GB, TM, 7.9.09, lines 46-50.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{37} The play that they mention is \textit{One Night in November}, a performance about the Moonlight Sonata raid on Coventry, November 1940. This play will be discussed a greater length in chapter 2.
memory. Joan Dyer described the noise of the planes as a ‘terrible noise, terrible noise. It was a drone, that's what it was. Well, call it a drone, but you always knew they were Germans.’

The emphasizing of the noise as ‘terrible’ and knowing they were German can be seen as the fear of the anticipation of what might be, of knowing that the planes were overhead but unable to do anything about what may happen if one of their bombs lands near you. Similarly, for first generation Evelyn Slater, a retired housewife, it is the noises associated with bombing that still have the greatest impact on her now:

You know, like, I can remember when they had the/ Vera Lynn came to Coventry when they celebrated the 50 years of the raids on Coventry. And they did a big searchlights and laser thing in the town, you know, and I say Vera Lynn came and sang all her songs and that, and my eldest daughter she'd got/ her children were young, were only young the time and they wanted me to go with them but I said ‘No’, I said ‘leave the children here with me, I'll look after the children’, ‘Oh, wouldn't you like to go mum?’ I said ‘No’, I said/ even now, when there's a thunderstorm in always reminds me of the Blitz, when you hear that cracking noise and, you know, bombs coming down. And, as I said, it's an experience I wouldn’t like the children to have.

Here Evelyn describes a major lasting effect on her life linked to the noises that she experienced during the bombing of Coventry. Yet this refusal to go to the commemoration of the Coventry Blitz was not mentioned by any of the subsequent generations. Her granddaughter Rachel Davison, aged 19, an Optical Assistant, actually mentioned that ‘I've never really asked her [about the war], which I probably should. But one day last year we went to the cathedral [Coventry Cathedral] and she got really upset so I think that’s probably why she's never said anything.’

The nature of the family relationship and how they discuss emotions is certainly not for a researcher to speculate upon. However, even at this rather opportune moment to discuss her grandmother’s distress on a family visit Rachel did not ask and Evelyn did not elaborate. Whilst not being as explicit to say that they could not handle the bombing,

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38 FD Dyer/ Wright, GB, TM, 5.6.08, lines 323-325.
39 FG Evelyn Slater, GB, TM, 25.8.08, lines 143-151.
40 TG Rachel Davison, GB, TM, 25.8.08, lines 9-11
there are hints to suggest peoples’ private memories differ from the version put forward by war propaganda and popular memory today and that the British people were less stoic than is believed. However, because of the subtlety in the accounts this is often not noticed by the later generations who, as we shall see later, focus on the more positive elements of their memories.

There are only two interviewees who go so far in their narratives to suggest that they were not defiant during the bombing and express a great amount of fear of what was happening. Both were children during the Blitz and were based in cities that experienced heavy bombing raids, Beth Clark from Coventry and John Matthews who was in London. The proximity to heavy bombing during the war played a key role in the way it was remembered by the first generation. There was a significant correlation between those who had experienced heavy raids recording less stoic narratives. Beth commented:

Gran used to say to me that I trembled an awful lot when she was wrapping me up. Whether that was the thing I’ve got or/ I probably just didn’t know where I was Tom. You’re very confused aren’t you when you’re that age. I can remember/ TM: So can you remember how you feel? BC: As I say very confused and frightened.41

Her overriding memories of her emotions are of being ‘confused and frightened’ and of trembling a lot when her mother was wrapping her up. She also remembers sheltering in the pantry and remarks ‘I can remember that ever so plainly. It really terrified me that part did getting under this/ the pantry was actually under the stairs but there was this big slab, cold slab, and it would be about that deep [indicates about 50cm] and it really did, that really did terrify me.’42 Again, she chooses to emphasise her fear in her memory of the Blitz, she does not attempt to seek reassurance or change the subject to a happier

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41 FG Beth Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 35-40.
42 Ibid., 50-53.
memory as we have seen before to align her own memories with the collective British memory. Her daughter, Jane, aged 47, a school secretary, has heard these stories and recalls that ‘I think she was quite scared, I do recall her telling me she used to shake when the sirens went’ and also ‘She always remembered there was a big beam across where they lay, across where they looked up there was a big concrete beam and she always used to think if the place got bombed it would drop on their heads. [laughs]’. This further emphasises the fact that, even in families where the first generation explicitly expresses memories of fear, the full emotions of that are not always transmitted to the subsequent generations. Jane recalls her mother telling her she used to shake when the sirens went but confesses that she only thinks she was scared and does not elaborate further in her interview. Also, when commenting on her mother being scared of the beam above her she laughs at the end rather than indicating she can empathise with the emotions her mother indicated in her narrative. In this sense the interviewee’s reaction suggests Jane is more influenced by the popular memory of defiance and therefore cannot identify with the narrative of her mothers’ experience.

In his recollections John Matthews, aged 76 and born 1931, a retired civil servant, also reveals great fear at the memory of his Blitz experience in London. He recalls that ‘I was in London for the Blitz and I had one or two bad experiences, in fact the worst day of my life was the day the Blitz started, that was Saturday 7th September 1940, and it's the only occasion in my life when I've had to watch other people being killed [gets emotional, eyes well with tears a little] I was only eight years old and you know that sort of thing you just don't forget.’ Much like Beth Clark his personal experience is more pertinent than the collective memory and he allows himself to become emotional as he describes people getting killed and admits it was the ‘worse
day of his life’. He also recalled watching a television documentary and ‘suddenly there was a sound of a wartime siren and it took me completely by surprise and I sort of panicked, I was about/ shelter you know, then of course I realised it was the television but I couldn't get to sleep, tossing and turning all night long you know. And until about 10 years ago I couldn’t talk about the Blitz at all, and the memories [cries quite heavily] just too awful”\(^46\). Much like how we discussed the affect of noises on first generation witnesses earlier John has also been affected long term by his Blitz experience, and hearing a wartime siren years later caused him a sleepless night and much worry. Paris, points out that for many young children the Blitz was a time of great excitement, but he also comments, unlike many other scholars, that for others it is remembered as a time of great fear.\(^47\) It is worth noting that both Beth and John were children during the Blitz (born 1933 and 1931 respectively) yet whereas we have seen the memories of Mary Pole slide back into more childlike recollections of having a picnic under the stairs, the examples here reveal a real childhood fear that Beth and John convey. In the interviews carried out for this study the fear element is very much in the minority but is nevertheless a significant factor. However, it could be argued that both reactions, excitement and fear, can be accommodated into our defiance model in the larger framework of memory. To remember it as exciting demonstrates defiance against the threat of death, whereas to remember it as terribly frightening shows a certain amount of sacrifice for the good of the nation, that they endured and did not capitulate. Despite the obvious amount of fear we have seen in John’s examples above even these could be accommodated into the ‘defiant’ framework of memory, proposed by scholars and what we would expect to find, because he did not capitulate despite the fear he was experiencing.


However, John goes even further in describing his experiences and the forthcoming examples show English people not coping, this cannot be explained as defiance, and is an exception to the idea that, however bad it got, Britain could take it. John revealed that ‘when it came to the bombing I mean I naturally looked towards my parents for reassurance and then I realised that they in fact were just as frightened and helpless as I was. When you’re only eight years old that is very alarming, very alarming indeed.’

He also commented that ‘I was quite convinced I was going to be dead by morning [crying]. In fact I wanted to die, I thought it would be easy way out, after what I’d been through the day before with the bombing I mean I just didn't want to live.’

Here again, from John’s own memories we see that he describes his own parents not coping whilst the bombs were falling, describing them as ‘helpless’. Also, rather than the impression of strong parents we get from Beth Clark’s example above, who wrapped her in blankets and took care of her, John remembers and emphasises the fact that his parents were just as scared as he was as an eight year old rather than being able to manage with the situation. When describing his own emotions John confesses that he ‘wanted to die’. Here John very candidly describes the ultimate act of submission in the face of the bomber threat. It is a very honest and emotional moment from a man so affected personally by the Blitz that his experiences lie so far outside the collective memory of stoicism and defiance.

However, as an interesting point to finish the chapter John was not immune to also using some of the techniques described before to add a defiant element to his experiences. Before he went into details about his bombing experience John described how he ‘was evacuated four times but my parents seemed to be rather anxious that I shouldn't miss any of the fun because they brought me back to London for the Blitz,

48 FG John Matthews, GB, TM, 17.11.08, lines 140-143.
49 Ibid., 165-168.
then when that was over I was sent away again and then they brought me back again for the doodlebugs, you know [laughter].

This is a description rather like the ironic humour described above that people used to reduce the tension in situations where there is the potential for an emotional response. John obviously went on to describe his traumatic experiences in detail but this example shows how, if he wished, he has the ability to characterise his experiences in a way that aligns itself with the way we have seen other participants describe their experience of the Blitz.

Summary

This chapter demonstrates that evidence of the defiant attitude, as highlighted by other scholars looking at public memory of the Second World War, can be interpreted as present in the interviews conducted. However, the interviewees expressed much more detailed examples of defiance from their own lives, such as a fatalistic attitude, or at times an almost reckless disregard for their own safety, than the more simplistic and perhaps a little overused example of David Low’s ‘Very Well, Alone’ cartoon, so often referenced. Whilst we have also seen how humour played a role in allowing people to distance themselves from the tragedy around them by referring to it in a humorous way, especially irony. This could be used to keep spirits up, but is also used now it seems in preference to conversing about actual tragedy. This is not an isolated instance; one only has to think of publications such as the Wipers Times, produced by British soldiers during the First World War, to see how people use humour to cope at times of distress. Finally, we have been confronted with two interviewees who experienced bombing first hand and spoke more openly about their genuine fear and the effect it had

50 Ibid., 92-96.
51 A copy can be found at http://www.guardian.co.uk/pictures/image/0,8543,-10904410005,00.html.
on them. This type of private memory differs greatly from the public memory that can be noted from studying popular culture, media, commemorations, or museums
Chapter 2- Sacrifice

The idea of ‘sacrifice’ is closely linked to defiance and some of the narratives in this chapter may contain elements that also could have been used as examples in the previous chapter. This is because, as would be logical, when a sacrifice is made, to be able to accept that sacrifice a certain level of stoicism would accompany that narrative. However, they are worth splitting up into separate sections because the narratives offer separate areas for our discussion of British memory of the Second World War. Specifically discussing air attack Connelly comments that the Blitz myth is one of the country pulling together as one, as well as everyone suffering equally because German bombs could not distinguish between class, wealth or status.¹ However, whereas the previous chapter focussed solely on the Blitz to draw the best examples for defiant narratives, sacrifice appears much more universal to the war experience and is present when the interviewees are discussing numerous topics. During the war propaganda stressed that sacrifice was expected of the British people and that everyone was expected to play their part. The 1940 short film Britain at Bay made the point of listing the Navy, Army and Air Force as Britain’s defence but then continued on to stress that defence rests on ‘all of us’.² Furthermore, in Transfer of Skill, also from 1940, the British craftsman is urged to use his training to help with the war effort by turning his expertise to fill the skills gap in war production, to temporarily sacrifice his main profession for the war effort.³ In this chapter we shall look at the matter of fact way people discuss the Blitz and other aspects of the war; the ‘myth of Coventry’s sacrifice; and the acceptance of wartime hardships. We will also look at evidence of unhappiness

¹ M. Connelly, We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War, (Harlow, 2004), p.149.
² ‘Britain at Bay’ (1940), in Land of Promise. The British Documentary Movement 1930-1950, British Film Institute.
³ ‘Transfer of Skill’ (1940), Land of Promise.
in the war; issues related to accepting the sacrifice involved with food rationing; and how the responses to pictures one and three in the group interviews relate to the theme of sacrifice.

Lack of Resentment in the Narratives

One of the areas where we can find evidence of this acceptance of sacrifice is in the way that there is a lack of anger towards being bombed in the interviews. This narrative was recorded in eighteen examples within thirteen interviews, in the below example the first and second generations from the Cox family are discussing the Germans dropping bombs on their return to Germany. Here Richard Cox (RC) is the first generation member, aged 82 and born 1926, a retired Art teacher, and his son Ed Cox (EC), aged 17 and born 1991, a student:

RC… they just couldn't get it so they had to turn round and go back to Germany/
EC. Oh so they dumped them off.
RC. They just dumped them off and went back to Germany.
EC. I remember now.
TM. What do you think about that, about them dumping bombs on civilians.
EC. Not brilliant, but understandable, you know considering that that's their objective anyway, no matter who they hit they're still causing damage, never mind if they're hitting steelworks or damaging civilians, unless/ more important to them to get back to Germany I would've thought for them anyway.
RC. They wanted to lighten their load.⁴

Richard describes a memory of the Luftwaffe releasing spare bombs over his home town (Weston-Super-Mare). This excerpt was from the family interview and was discussed because in his original interview Ed had commented that he did not know any of his father’s experiences of being bombed. However, when talking about it here he confesses that he does remember and had been told this story before. What is emphasised within the family is interesting here because in his individual interview

⁴ FD Cox, GB, TM, 30.1.09, lines 62-72.
Richard commented to the interviewer initially that because of his age in 1939 it ‘wasn’t until the later part of the war that I got involved in it’ when he was old enough to join the military.\(^5\) Much like other first generation interviews Richard then focuses largely on the memories that are important to him rather than a chronological description of his wartime experiences and this is reflected in Ed’s account where he notes being told memories at ad hoc times but focuses on his father’s time in the military. When we also consider that Ed mentioned about studying the World Wars in History but also that ‘the modern warfare aspect to it was really fascinating for me. You know I prefer that to the home front’\(^6\) we can begin to see how the military aspect of his father’s experiences would perhaps dominate family discussion. However, after remembering hearing of his father experiencing bombing Ed does give his opinion. In echoes of the previous chapter Richard’s description includes no evidence of victimisation but here the tone is focused upon the acceptance of this action, that it was the natural thing to do to jettison unused bombs over the civilian population. Ed takes up this theme, calling it ‘understandable’ and then offers mitigating circumstances for the pilots that they wanted to get back to Germany and Richard agrees that it was beneficial for them to ‘lighten their load’. There is some truth in this but once more we have to focus on how this has influenced their judgement to be uncritical of the choice of dropping the bombs on civilians, on a town of seemingly little strategic importance, rather than elsewhere. I would argue that it is the prevailing collective memory of sacrifice, and the focus upon everyone having sacrificed in equal measure, that frames the recollections of events like this in such a way, to be retold without complaint or judgement both in the first and subsequent generations.

\(^5\) FG Richard Cox, GB, TM, 30.1.09, lines 10-11.
\(^6\) SG, Ed Cox, GB, TM, 30.1.09, lines 123-124.
This argument is further emphasised by examples from the Pole/Rye family interviews. In his interview third generation member Dominic Rye recalled a story he had heard from his grandmother that she ‘was walking home from school and there was a German fighter that took pot shots at them as they were walking so they just ran, but to them it was just a game in you know, it was just/ children have to play no matter when they grow up, so to them that was their playing in the street.’ This had not been mentioned in the other interviews but when it was mentioned by the interviewer during the family interview first generation member Mary Pole (MP) and her daughter, second generation member Ann Pole (AP), aged 54, a secondary teacher, both discussed it in detail:

MP. Well I used to go to this country school, Westwood Heath, it was a three classroom school, and there was this house down the road and they'd got apple trees, and we used to go down there at lunchtime to get apples and that. And going/ coming back from there, it was when there was a Messerschmit then a Spitfire, fighting over The Dunlop, not The Dunlop, The Standard. Anyway we watched, we stood watching it, then all of a sudden the German plane/ and he must have seen us walking up the road because we were standing looking up, and all of a sudden he dived and he machine gunned us along the road. Well of course we all dashed into the hedge, you know I remember this one girl Eileen Bilk she was, she just stood in the middle-of-the-road, you know crying and somebody had to drag her into the hedge. I must have been very clever at that point because I got under the hedge [laughter], frightened to death. Yeah then/ that happened then we saw the Spit/ the Messerschmit shot down actually, you know it/ after that we don't know. But the headmaster Mister Wright, came looking for us, and we went up to the school and there was an air raid shelter in the school and that was it. So yeah that was quite exciting at the time, we were all frightened to death, I think we even left our apples under the tree, you know that we'd brought.
AP. Terrifying, you can't imagine somebody shooting children can you?  
TM. Did you know that?  
AP. Yes, I remember that story now you said it, yeah.  
MP. Yes it was so/ we stood watching it and it just sort of [makes shooting noise] on the road, there were bullet holes all along the road. If we’d have stayed on the road/  
AP. He'd have got you.  
MP. They’d have been no more sort of thing.  
AP. Gosh.

7 TG Dominic Rye, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 15-18.
MP. I wouldn't be here telling the tale, so that's it. Yes that's an experience I forgot to tell you.
TM. What do you think about that? About the German/
AP. Well I can't imagine somebody shooting/
DR. Shooting at children/
AP. Children. But then, you know if he'd just been in a dogfight, his adrenaline must have been up and I suppose your judgement’s impaired, so/ I've never been in that situation so I don't know.
MP. Thank goodness.
AP. Yeah, that's right.8

This is a long quote from the interview but is worth reprinting because of the depth of what is talked about. Mary mentions being frightened but it is a side point to the more obvious exciting and almost whimsical tone to the narrative. Much like the example from the Cox family the second and third generation repeat the context within which the first generation member describes the event. The excited nature with which some interviewees discuss their experience of the Battle of Britain will be discussed further later. However, here I wish to focus upon how a memory about a German pilot who tried to gun down defenceless children in the street is articulated without any feelings of malice towards the perpetrator or victim status within any of the Pole/ Rye family.

Whilst the third generation, in the individual interview, trivialises the incident as a ‘game’ and likens it to ‘playing in the street’, the first generation member also calls it ‘exciting’ and the second generation member, hearing this story for the first time in the family interview, whilst at first appearing to be shocked at the incident, then relents and offers mitigating circumstances for the pilot by suggesting that his judgement would have been ‘impaired’ by the adrenaline of being in a dogfight. The lack of any victimisation can highlight the acceptance of the possibility of death as being a part of the war experience for the British people and therefore not something to dwell upon or emphasise in memory.

8 FD Pole/ Rye, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 196-230.
In other examples some interviewees also focussed upon the technical aspects of bombing as opposed to any emotional focus. In the example below first generation witness Evelyn Slater recalls how she heard the *Luftwaffe* would use a local canal to target the gasworks:

ES. And I can remember they used to/ used to be/ used to say they were looking for the canal, the planes used to look for the canal/ TM. Oh right.
ES. To lead them because the light used to shine/ TM. Yeah the moon/
ES. The water, the moonlight used to come up at night like and the moonlight used to light the canal up and they could/ the moonlight used to direct them to the gasworks. 9

This description even seems to hint at the ingenuity of the tactics of the German bombers to think to use the canal to direct them to their target. Eleven examples from seven interviews demonstrate a technical knowledge of German bombing tactics but a further six examples from six interviews hint at an appreciation of the capabilities of German bombing tactics. Of these seventeen examples only one is not from the first generation interviews, this is interesting because it indicates that the contemporary witnesses were keen to know how they were being bombed, but this is information they rarely choose to share in a family setting or is not retained by later generations. Given the ad hoc nature of brief stories, or ‘snippets’, at opportune moments that appear to be the way most family members heard about the first generation’s memories this is perhaps not a surprise. The mention of bombing tactics was possibly something that the first generation considered appropriate for an interviewer wanting to discuss World War II but not of relevance and too technical for their family. This would also make sense if we considered the survival instinct of humans and the need to know as much about what was threatening you in order to survive it, but when that danger had passed there was now no real need to preserve the focus on this information. First generation

9 FG Evelyn Slater, GB, TM, 25.8.08, lines 53-59.
member Joan Dyer commented that she ‘saw the incendiaries, because they used to light them up first, the incendiaries came first. The Germans used to come in, you get the first wave come over, they drop the incendiary bombs, and then after you get the next wave coming in, because everything was lit up, so they knew where the factories were, and of course that's how it happened.’ Here again we see how she uses her knowledge of the German bombing tactics to emphasise how effective they were, acknowledge the success of their methods and give an explanation of ‘how it happened’. A focus on the technical elements of a bombing raid were reported during the war as a Mass Observation (MO) report from Leicester after an air raid in November 1940 also reveals an interest in the details of the types of bomb used. The author notes that rumours about ‘more technical knowledge of the type of bomb used began to appear; “this was a land mine, that was an aerial torpedo”, and so on’. It is also reasonable to suggest that this type of conversation was an easy way to broach the subject of a raid without having to focus upon the suffering, and therefore a lack of focus on the distress has helped feed a popular narrative of sacrifice that excluded this suffering. In coming to these conclusions using the available scholarly work on the representation of World War II in Britain this has been interpreted as a nuance of sacrifice. However, although this certainly seems a very detached way of conversing about a horrific incident, we must also consider that the participants were attempting to understand their experiences and gain a level of emotional control over what had happened. We must remain open to other interpretations and consider whether someone studying the material without knowledge of the work already done in this area would come to the same conclusions.

10 FD Dyer/Wright, GB, TM, 5.6.08, lines 292-296.
I will now focus upon the matter of fact manner in which participants discussed wartime experiences, firstly solely to do with the bombing raids and then more generally to other areas of Britain’s war memory. To discuss anguish and grief in this way was a popular tone for the interviewees on which to base their memories and family recollections. Much like the German bombing tactics we must bear in mind that this could be a way of retaining emotional control over a situation and we have approached the material influenced by scholarly work that promotes the concept of sacrifice in the British war memory. Thirty five examples from nineteen interviews were recorded for matter of fact descriptions just about bombing, and a further fifty seven examples from twenty eight interviews were recorded from other areas of distress. Unlike the examples above of the knowledge of German bombing tactics the second and third generations are more strongly represented here with thirty of the total eighty five examples coming from the later generations. This is in some ways unsurprising because it is easier to discuss in a detached way something that did not happen to you directly. Furthermore, matter of fact descriptions can occur in many family stories, rather than just the technical approach to bombing we discussed above where it did not.

In the below example first generation witness Evelyn Slater describes losing one of her school friends:

ES. I was just telling Mandy, I don't know whether I said it to you but I had a school friend and we were walking along the Foleshill Road and I didn't know that they were in the shelter, their house was still left standing but their/ I think I did tell you, and their shelter had a direct hit and they were all killed, but the house was still standing. And she was a girl that I was quite friendly with at school like, you know. But, things like that, that was sad.
TM. Yeah.
ES. And you'd hear of people losing their mother or father killed in Blitzs and that like. It was quite a traumatic time really I suppose. I think being so young you learn to live with these things like, you know, get over it.\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\) FD Slater/ Davison, GB, TM, 25.8.08, lines 50-59.
There are elements in this narrative of the ironic humour discussed in the previous chapter but I want to focus here on the detached way Evelyn describes the loss of her school friend. Whilst she does use words such as ‘sad’ and ‘traumatic’ the overall tone is undeniably distant from the actual events she describes. However, this could just as much be that Evelyn was remaining distant in this narrative to retain her composure in the interview setting. Rather than describe any other specific examples Evelyn expresses that she heard of people losing parents in the Blitz and she chooses to finish the description by saying that she learned to live with this and she got over them. Again this brings us back to a memory of traumatic experiences where sacrifice is expected and not dwelt upon. This can be seen from propaganda at the time, in the short film *Ordinary People* a married couple are shown getting on with their lives even after their home has suffered bomb damage. Neither of the couple is emotional about what has happened they simply live around the damage, there is no evidence of despair or even anger.\(^\text{13}\) This is not just evident in the first generation interviewees, below is an excerpt from one of the second generation group interviews, conducted in the home belonging to two of the interviewees with five people aged between 42-62 and born between 1946-1966, consisting of a married couple and their three friends who are siblings:

KL. Well the story had it, you know where Owen and Owens was, there was a store there and they come over and they bombed it that bad and there was that many people killed and they couldn't get them out, but they just lime pitted it. And people were still like/
GC. Where was that?
KL. In a shop?
EH. The site where Owen and Owens/
KL. Yeah.
EH. They wouldn't have built a shop on it/  
KL. They had to put lime on it, they couldn't get them out because it was bombed that badly.
EH. You think they'd have made a memorial of it though wouldn't you?

\(^{13}\) ‘Ordinary People’ (1941), *Land of Promise*. 
KL. Yeah.
EH. Oh let's build Owen and Owens on it [laughs].

Kiera Liston (KL), aged 57, a logistics manager, recalls a story she had heard where a department store had been built on the top of a site where a mass grave had been created because of the amount of dead bodies after a raid. Initially the other members of the group doubt this to be true but then her younger sister Eve Hendry (EH), aged 56, a social worker, says she believes a memorial should have been put there before laughing about the fact that a department store had been built on top. The initial thought for a memorial does not last long before there is laughter about the absurdity of just building on top of it. Kiera actually gets cut off by the other group members in her story about the mass grave and may have gone on to describe the severity of what happened to the bodies in a more solemn context. Indeed later in the extract she again tries to bring the topic back to what happened by repeating the point about using lime. However, if Kiera was trying to make this point the rest of the group do not focus on this context because the conversation following this extract moves onto other topics. Indeed, a moment later Grace Campbell, a 42 year old housewife commented that ‘it's a bit of a testament to human endurance isn't it that people lived through that’ and this ends the discussion.

Using the arguments already raised in the secondary literature this example could thus be analysed as the majority of the group reverting to the popular memory of sacrifice in light of Kiera’s information. If Kiera did say this story to highlight the human cost of the war on the civilian population of Britain then the rest of the group do not offer any judgement on the morality of this decision, they discuss the situation briefly, with levity and finally in a way where it was something that had to be done and therefore, although not ideal, to be accepted.

14 GD, SG, GB, TM, 19.7.09, lines 570-584.
15 Ibid., 590-591.
As was mentioned this style of describing tragic events is not just reserved for memories of the Blitz. In this example second generation member Jane Clark readily accepts the death of an aunt of her mother as acceptable wartime sacrifice:

JC… the only person who died during the war, in 1943, her aunt died from some sort of illness that they never really got to the bottom of, some sort of illness where she couldn’t really eat and couldn’t swallow properly anymore, it sounded really nasty, could quite possibly have been cancer. But because it was during the war she didn’t receive that much medical attention because everything was diverted elsewhere. That’s really the only time/ the only thing I can think of at the moment of the only loss she had during the war. But it was really nothing to do with the bombing or anything like that. I don’t think.

TM: Do you think people had to put up with things like that a lot during war time, things being moved to the war effort?

JC: I would imagine so, yeah, I would imagine that all medical skills, nursing skills, were swamped. But like if there was a major catastrophe now it would just be. So other things, people with normal illnesses, even tragic illnesses like she had because she died very young, she was engaged at the time when she died, they don’t really/ there’s much more capacity to deal with that in peacetime when you’ve not got everybody trying to look after wounded soldiers and things like that. Yeah, quite sad.

Even though Jane notes her mother’s aunt was ‘quite young’ and ‘engaged’ and even comments that it was ‘quite sad’ again the overall tone is one of acceptance and that this was to be expected of the population during World War II. This story was not mentioned by the first generation and so it is possible that Jane has heard it from elsewhere within the family and the matter of fact description is because it is not a key family memory, repeated often. However, we can see that there is no complaint against how her mother’s aunt was treated and blame is not proportioned to anyone. We don’t know whether her mother’s aunt received inadequate medical attention because resources were directed elsewhere for the war. However, we do know that pregnant women and babies got extra rations of milk, cod liver oil and orange juice because the health of Britain was still considered a priority during the war years. What is important from Jane’s testimony is that she so readily presumes that her mother’s aunt died

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16 SG Jane Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 110-125.
because of the shortages and that she does not criticise this decision but accepts it. This does support the scholarly work that highlights the British emphasis on sacrifice, and people had to endure extra during wartime.

The Myth of Coventry’s Sacrifice for Victory

In some of the interviews conducted with families in Coventry there is a repetition of the story that Churchill allowed Coventry to be bombed on November 14 1940, even though he knew about the attack, to disguise the fact that British code breakers at Bletchley Park had broken the German secret code. This was asserted ten times in ten different interviews when talking about the subject and evenly across the three generations (three examples in the first generation, five in the second and twice in the third). In the below example the interviewer asked first generation witness Beth Clark if she thought it was the correct decision:

TM: Do you think that was the right thing to do?
BC: Yes I do Tom now, I know a lot of/ I think around, in that one night around 500/600 wasn’t it, people, but what else could he have done? Because it was a vital part of this/ the codes weren’t they. You know I think what else could he have done. Do you agree with me or not?
TM: Well, yeah, I do.17

Beth repeats the commonly held idea that Coventry had to be sacrificed for the overall war effort. The fact that she seeks reassurance from the interviewer is interesting and indicates that she is not completely sure of her assertions but nevertheless does not doubt the authenticity of the story. Her daughter Sara also notes that ‘I know that it was pivotal to the war; one of the things that was, but for the people that died it made no difference did it really, because they died and its quite emotional I think for the/ especially after seeing the play. It’s just gutting, absolutely gutting that a City can be

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17 FG Beth Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 323-328.
sacrificed like that. Sara was interviewed at a different time, in relation to her father’s war memories, however her beliefs about the bombing of Coventry are typical and again she does not question their validity. Furthermore Beth’s grandson (nephew to Sara), Tim, comments that ‘they deciphered the code and they found out that they were going to bomb Coventry but they let it happen to make the Germans think that we didn’t know anything about that. And then in retaliation/ I think most of Coventry was destroyed, at least most of the city centre was destroyed and in retaliation for that the city of Dresden got bombed.’ Tim adds a further element to the story that the bombing of Dresden was a revenge attack for the raid on Coventry. However, again we have the absence of any critical evaluation of the belief that Coventry was sacrificed.

However, the overall premise of the story, that Coventry was sacrificed by Churchill appears to be a myth. This myth seems to have surfaced in the 1970s when Captain FW Winterbotham in The Ultra Secret, Cave Brown in Bodyguard of Lies and William Stevenson in A Man Called Intrepid all recorded different versions of the story. However, since Churchill’s former private secretary, John Colville, asserted in 1981 that ‘until the German directional beam was turned on the doomed city nobody knew where the giant raid would be. Certainly the Prime Minister did not’, scholars have generally accepted that the warnings came too late for Churchill to have done anything. The fact that it continues to be repeated in Coventry is indicative of the way it fits so conveniently into the overall British myth of sacrifice for the people of that city. It is a popular idea to think that the inhabitants of Coventry may have lost much when the city was bombed but that it was for the greater good of the overall war effort makes this a reason for the city’s inhabitants to be proud.

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18 SG Sara Clark, GB, TM, 25.1.09, lines 53-56.
19 TG Tim Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 27-31.
A stage production called *One Night in November* came out in Coventry in March 2008 which claimed that Churchill did indeed know about the bombing of Coventry in advance and sacrificed the city. Such was the writer’s conviction that the tagline to the play was even *Would you sacrifice a city to win a war?* Quite a claim, that the supposed sacrificing of Coventry was pivotal to the success of the whole war. The play proved hugely popular within Coventry and following a further sell-out run in November 2009 it returned again in November 2010. Its production and popularity has caused Bletchley Park to issue a rebuttal of the claims that they and Churchill knew Coventry was going to be bombed in advance. In an article entitled *The Truth Behind the Myth* Bletchley Park admits that whilst at times in the war some information was held back ‘The raid on Coventry on 14 November 1940 (Operation Moonlight Sonata) was NOT one of them.’ It is interesting that of the interviewees from Coventry who had an opinion on this issue all accepted that Churchill did know about the bombing and for them the issue was about the sacrifice of the people of the city for the bigger war effort.

There was an interesting difference of opinion with regard to this sacrifice in the Pole/Rye family. When asked if it was the right thing to do first generation Mary Pole replied:

MP. No, no, no, no, how many got killed? How many were buried?
TM. Yeah.
MP. I mean, I had an aunt and she was bombed out. Her house, everything went up in the air.
TM. Yeah.
MP. No, it was wrong, it was very, very wrong. Well I think it was/
TM. Yeah.
MP. ‘Cause what did we do after that, we went and bombed Dresden didn’t we?"
She also repeats the Dresden element of the myth, however, she is a notable exception to the rule that perceived this as a glorious sacrifice and points out a relative who lost her house to justify this. However, in the later generations the power of this popular memory of sacrifice is much more pertinent than the memories of the first generation witness. Her daughter Ann Pole comments:

AP… I know my Dad was distraught at the thought that his father could have been saved.
TM. Oh right. Yeah.
AP. I suppose, you know d/ I’m not as close to it/
TM. Yeah.
AP. As he was/
TM. Yeah.
AP. And decisions are made in wartime aren’t they that/ I’m sure there are lots of strategical decisions that are made like that. So it didn’t affect me as much but it did affect my Dad and I won’t tell you what he called Churchill/
TM. Oh right.
AP. But it wasn’t very pleasant. [Laughs]
TM. Oh right. [Laughs] What do you think? Do you think it was/
AP. I just think it’s, probably# you know, the spoils of war, I think things happened.
TM. It was the right thing? Yeah.
AP. It probably/ it might have saved lives in Coventry but it would have taken lives elsewhere.
TM. Yeah.
AP. And it probably did hasten the end of the war, that he didn’t know about it.23

She knows from her father that her grandfather died that night and her narrative shows her father was very emotional about this decision. However, she detaches herself from this family loyalty to objectively assess that, according to the myth, the decision to sacrifice Coventry saved lives and hastened the end of the war. Ann’s son, Dominic, is in agreement with his mother, when asked if he was sceptical about the Churchill story he replies ‘I think it’s very hard to prove it either way really, all it takes is one document to be shredded and that piece of history is lost forever as you know as a historian. So there is no such thing as perfect history, so I think it is very possible I think, if he did

23 SG Ann Pole, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 112-130.
know that it was going to happen and by bolstering the defences too much it would give away the fact that the Enigma code had been cracked then I think yeah, sacrifice a city to win a war.\textsuperscript{24} Here, Dominic does accept the fact that there may be some dispute over the story of Churchill knowing in advance about the attack on Coventry. However, Dominic had seen the play One Night in November and finishes with a comment mimicking the tagline of the play whilst at the same time answering the question it posed. Once more we are drawn to the conclusion that Coventarians view that they suffered so the war effort could succeed, and this seemingly selfless act is their part of pulling together with the rest of Britain during the Blitz and gives the city an undisputed righteous role in the war for them to be proud of.

**Acceptance of Hardships During the War**

In the interviews conducted when any hardships associated with the war were discussed they tended to be within the context of a general acceptance of what had to be endured. Under the analytical heading ‘acceptance of war hardships’ in the qualitative analysis software thirty nine instances in twenty one interviews were recorded as falling within this category. These thirty nine examples were heavily weighted towards the first generation with thirty three of the examples coming from this category; furthermore, twenty five of these were from female participants. A possible explanation for this bias towards female first generation participants is their role on the Home Front during the Second World War, where women were targeted by propaganda to carry on and make the best of what was available for the war effort. Thus, first generation member Jenny Smith commented that ‘when Peter was two and a half nearly three I took a job with the gas company of all things. Meter reader, it was one of the men’s jobs, and collector. In

\textsuperscript{24} TG Dominic Rye, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 74-79.
those days the gas meter was not shillings it was pennies, and you had five shillings worth of coppers and four bags of those for a pound so can you imagine the weight? So if you had six pounds you knew you had them.'

She makes a point of having to get a job to support herself during the war and emphasises that it was difficult work considering the amount she had to carry around with her. However, later she goes on to say about the work that ‘it was a hard job in a way but I enjoyed it, obviously when I’d got about £6 of coppers, I used to drop them in at the different pubs because they were always glad of change’. Here, she comments that despite the fact it was a ‘hard job’ her memory is also that she ‘enjoyed it’. The specific memory she highlights is that she would swap the change in the pubs on her round; thus focussing on how she eased the burden of her workload rather than how heavy it was for her to carry. Her daughter Shirley also recalls hearing about Jenny’s war time job:

SW: And me mum used to empty the gas meters I think during the war so she used to have a few narrow escapes when sometimes a bomb went off.
AL: Yeah. Is that what her job was then was it?
SW: Yeah she used to go round emptying all the/ carrying all that money on her
[laughs]
AL: Really.
SW: From the gas meters yeah.

In her narrative there is little acknowledgement of the fact that the job may have been difficult. Indeed, the descriptive detail of the weight of the coins is only hinted at in Shirley’s narrative with a more factual comment about carrying lots of money. This is consistent with some of the extracts we have already discussed where the more sensual elements of the memories are not present in the later generations recollections. In fact after mentioning how her mother used to carry a lot of money she laughs as the thought

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25 FG Jenny Smith, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 40-45.
26 Her husband had been captured in the Far East and was a prisoner of war of the Japanese. She also does not complain about having to get a job and not being adequately supported whilst her husband was in captivity.
27 FG Jenny Smith, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 137-140.
28 SG Shirley Wilkinson, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 83-89.
of it is amusing to her. Shirley is not bitter or angry on behalf of her mother because the story of her mother’s war work has never been relayed to her in that context, the fact it was hard, heavy work is not focussed on by the first generation in favour of a story where she did not mind having to do this during the war. Furthermore, in the earlier part of the extract Shirley even glosses over how the work could be dangerous because of bombing during her work whilst she was out. The whole context is that this was to be expected and was necessary during the war.

This idea that sacrifice should be expected from everyone in relation to war work was important to British wartime propaganda and should be explored further. The MOI 1942 film Builders sought to promote the fact that everyone was helping and a part of the war effort. As Lusted argues the builders in the film should not feel distant from the war effort because the production portrays the men as bound up in the nation’s common sacrifice; they are helping the war effort by building homes in Britain. Furthermore, through ‘images of communality in the living quarters where the all-male group sing, drink, play cards and darts: sacrifice [is depicted] as fun.’

Thus, it can be viewed in light of the secondary material that the interviewees are keen to stress how they helped out in the war because this is a positive trait associated with the British war memory. Thirty seven separate examples over twenty two interviews were recorded in the analysis of narratives where the interviewee stressed how they or their family sacrificed their time or safety or both for the war effort. First generation witness Audrey Bell, aged 82 and born 1925, a retired personal secretary, remembers how she took part in fire watching duties herself. She stated that ‘I worked in a bank which was/ had three/ four stories. And we used to have to fire watch and we had exercises of

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30 Not all of these examples have been used here because there is some crossover of this topic in the next chapter and eight examples from eight of the interviews are used there.
crawling down/ it wasn't called abseiling in those days, but coming down on a rope from the top of this building.\textsuperscript{31} Her daughter, Erin Bell, aged 53 and born 1954, a self employed salesperson, also recalls this instance and remarks that ‘she told me that she worked for ‘Bowmakers’ when she was 15 and she did fire watch which I always thought was hilarious because she is only little you know [laughter]. What they thought she was going to do I don't know [laughter].\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, Audrey’s granddaughter and Erin’s daughter, Gemma Bell, aged 23 and born 1985, a risk assessment manager, also recalls this and comments that ‘She also mentioned that she was the, she was like a fire warden person. I don't think she really/ I don't think that role ever really materialised into anything too difficult or challenging.\textsuperscript{33} All three of the family members talk about this extra war work that Audrey took part in, indicating that it has been a topic of family discussion at some point. Audrey comments about how she did some training exercises to be ready should she be needed. However, Erin suggests that because of her size she felt her mother would have difficulty being able to do anything to help and laughs at the thought of her tackling a blaze. Similarly Gemma knows that her grandmother did this but points out that actually she never had to do anything difficult. However, what all three narratives have in common is the fact Audrey was doing something useful for the war effort. Should she have been needed there is no evidence from the narratives that she would not have used her training and, despite her natural disadvantages to the role, would have done her best to help. It is these types of recollections, quite prominent through all three generations of the Bell family, that I believe demonstrates the sacrifice that is present in the British war memory. That despite disadvantages and people being in unfamiliar roles, the British people were still prepared to give everything to help win the war.

\textsuperscript{31} FG Audrey Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 78-81.
\textsuperscript{32} SG Erin Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 44-47.
\textsuperscript{33} TG Gemma Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 83-85.
However, some interviewees expressed discontent at having to undertake certain war roles and this was recorded in eighteen examples over fifteen interviews. First generation member Richard Cox described how he was ‘getting out/ thinking that I was going to get out of the army by volunteering for the air force and they put me in the army, not only the army but the bloody infantry! Which I purposely didn't want, it's often called the PBI.’

Later in the interview Richard explains that the abbreviation PBI stands for Poor Bloody Infantry because it was believed they had the worst role in the armed forces. Here he is describing a situation where he was forced to go into a role that he was unhappy in. His son, Ed, is aware of this disappointment as during his interview he commented ‘I can tell that he was envious of his brother getting into the air force when he/ he was just too late really, when they weren’t recruiting anymore. But he does speak about his brothers in terms of the war quite a lot because they were kind of my age at that point/ just beyond that. So yeah/ it's tough to know exactly what he thought, because you know he's getting on a bit now, but yeah there's definitely a sense that he really wanted to be in the air rather than stuck on the floor somewhere not doing much.’

Ed’s comments about developing a ‘sense’ of his father’s feelings is not uncommon amongst the later generations who, even when they are less certain about exact emotions associated with memories, are able to recall some knowledge of general feelings. This is evidence that whilst specific details may dissipate through the generations more broad knowledge of what was experienced remains. The narratives from the Cox family are unlike the other sacrifice memories in this chapter so far because it appears a reluctant sacrifice that Richard took on rather than the expected sacrifice discussed earlier where it was not complained about but rather people accepted it and continued with their lives. There is a danger here that the analysis is forcing the
interpretation of sacrifice onto Richard’s memory where he was just trying to re-tell the circumstances about how he came to be in the military without any real belief of a conscious sacrifice on his behalf. However, this does appear a contentious issue for Richard that he could not join the air force and was only left with the infantry, and Ed acknowledges that he feels his father would much rather have been in the air force. Therefore as he did not refuse, although not as cheerily as the examples above, Richard’s narrative can align itself with the overall metanarrative of sacrifice in the British war memory in that he still ‘did his bit’.

This is slightly more ambiguous elsewhere however, in this example below a second generation group, the same group who were discussing the building of a department store over a mass grave we looked at earlier, are describing what some first generation members they know did during the war:

EH. He's actually a pacifist [says name], but he was a young guy and he got subscribed, whatever they call it.
AC. Conscripted.
EH. Conscripted.
KR. For a lot of people there was no choice was either do that or do some god-awful job.
EH. Or go to prison.
KR. Or go to prison, yeah.
KL. So I/
KR. My dad joined the 38th# and said they wanted to put him down the pit, and he said ‘I’m not going down there’.  

Here, the context is much less about accepting sacrifice as they clearly offer the opinion that the majority of people had to do what they were told, or do ‘some god-awful job’ or ‘go to prison’. The impression here is not of the people willingly sacrificing their normal lives for the war effort but of a nation forced to do so by their government. Keith Richardson (KR), aged 62 and born 1946, a driver for an elderly care firm, even comments that his father refused to go into the coal-mining sector (‘down the pit’) and

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36 GD, SG, GB, TM, 19.7.09, lines 347-357.
later in the interview we learn his father actually spent the war in the Navy. The interview was carried out in Keith’s home and at one point he draws attention to his father’s framed war medals on the living room wall, highlighting them to the interviewer and the group.\textsuperscript{37} We can therefore infer that Keith’s father had told him about refusing to be a miner and that Keith has drawn a certain level of pride for what his father did in the war as part of the Navy by so prominently displaying his medals. Thus the issue of refusing to help in the mines has been rather overshadowed in the family memory of what was achieved in the Navy. However, when we use the interviews in the context to contrast to the scholarly work already done on how Britons are happy to highlight the sacrifice of the individual as a part of the nation, we find examples of those who simply refused to do certain roles, despite promoting their families involvement elsewhere.

\textbf{Rationing}

Rationing is a popular area of sacrifice in the British war memory where everyone is supposed to have played their part in foregoing certain luxuries to help preserve food. Yet considering its prominence it is perhaps surprising that as a topic it was more than often initiated by the interviewer from the prompt sheet rather than brought up by the interviewees. Yet it is certainly evident in the narratives where in twenty examples over seventeen interviews the interviewees stress how they coped on rations rather than complain about what they didn’t have. First generation females again make up a significant proportion of these examples, ten instances, and, as we discussed above, this can be accounted for because the issue of rationing on the Home Front would more likely have affected them most. For instance, first generation member

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}, 467.
Audrey Bell commented that ‘You could manage on it. You had to be frugal with sugar and butter and in a way, well it's a bit like now to some degree the price of things going up and up and up, erm.. you learn to manage.’ 38 Here the focus is on the family’s ability to cope and adjust to the shortages caused by rationing. This is also the focus of her daughter Erin’s recollections:

But, and obviously food was tight, but you see again my dad’s parents, my granddad, was a gamekeeper in Norfolk, so there was fresh meat, game, all the time. My grandma ran chickens, about 300 chickens, and used to sell fresh eggs in the war so they always have fresh eggs. So they never really, although there was rationing, I mean they could make do from what they could catch or shoot. And my granddad was a brilliant shot so if it moved he’d have it and it would be in the pot. So you know there was never a shortage there, I think my mum's family definitely suffered more but she never really spoke about it I wouldn't say, not to the point that “oh we were desperately hungry”. 39

Here she talks about the way her grandfather’s family coped well because of the way that they could supplement their diet through a little hunting. However, even in comparing that to her mother’s family, who she is aware ‘suffered more’ Erin still qualifies that by asserting that she has never heard her mother say that they were ‘desperately hungry’. By the time the third generation member, Gemma Bell, comes to discuss how her family coped under rationing she chooses to focus solely on her grandfather’s experiences. Like her mother she mentions how her ‘granddad's family [were] from Norfolk, so they were quite rural and they were sort of lucky in that sense that they could sort of use the farm animals and sort of get away with things they probably shouldn't have been.’ 40 However, she also added another story about her grandfather, she recalled how ‘I remember my granddad actually telling me when he was posted up in/ I think it was up in Glasgow or somewhere, he stayed in this sort of B & B house they were put up in, this woman used to make jam roly-poly or something with like the tiniest teaspoon of jam [TM laughs], but still call it jam roly-poly. So I

38 FG Audrey Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 368-370.
39 SG Erin Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 221-229.
40 TG Gemma Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 36-38.
think people just got on with it and the rationing was just something that you had to cope with." In this example Gemma, although using the example of her grandfather, recalls a narrative very similar in style to her grandmother’s example above. Both narratives begin by commenting on the necessity of having to save food, and not having as much as they were used to, but both finish with the comment that indicates this was to be accepted and people were able to cope with this sacrifice.

However, in some of the interviews I propose that there are subtle hints that the memory of sacrificing food during rationing has had an impact and caused lasting memories to the first generation’s attitude towards food. Second generation member Lara Miller, aged 41 and born 1967, a residential manager, recalled that her ‘Mum would tell me things about rationing books and how they used to take the books to get their tea and their sugar and what they could have. Especially as we were kids and you have your sweets and she'd be like saying “well we didn't have sweets when we were little” and jelly, they used to eat jelly, jelly cubes, so that's what they ate as something sweet.’ In this extract Lara commented how her mother saw the need to remind her daughter that during rationing they did not have the treats that Lara enjoyed as a child and had to settle for ‘jelly cubes’ as an imitation. It is interesting that of the eight times the long term attitude towards food is mentioned over six interviews, seven of those references are from the second or third generations. It is the children and grandchildren who have noticed when the first generation mentions something about rationing that they perceive as having a lasting impression on them. This has also been significant enough for them to remember it. Third generation member Rachel Davison says of her grandparents that ‘sometimes they sort of make jokes about things like at family get-togethers, they say like just stuff about rations and I never think anything of it. But it

41 Ibid., lines 64-69.
42 SG Lara Miller, GB, TM, 26.2.09, lines 37-41.
must be something that they do think about.” Here again Rachel has noticed how the first generation witnesses within her own family talk about rationing at family occasions. Although Rachel does say that their comments are light hearted and they ‘make jokes’ she does point out that this must be because it is on their minds and something they are thinking about. Occasions within the family where food is being shared appears to be an opportunity for some first generation members to talk about shortages that they experienced during the war. These shortages are sometimes expressed overtly in the case of Lara’s mother, or in a more light-hearted manner like Rachel’s grandparents. However, the readiness from the first generation to highlight to family members the shortages experienced was evidenced in some of the families interviewed.

One area where the first generation did openly criticise the rationing system is the rationing that continued after the war had ended. First generation member Maureen Nicholls commented that after 1945 ‘gradually it got that more and more things were rationed, and I mean even bread was rationed, then of course they rationed clothes, we all had clothing coupons. So it/ you know it was inconvenient things much as anything’ She chooses to highlight here the escalation of rationing after 1945 and this topic, and also instances where interviewees wished to emphasise how long rationing went on after the war, were quite common in the narratives. Indeed, it was mentioned thirty four times in twenty-two of the interviews, a significant amount considering it was not directly related to World War II and the interviewees chose to bring up this

43 TG Rachel Davison, GB, TM, 25.8.08, lines 53-55.
44 FG Maureen Nicholls, GB, TM, 18.6.08, lines 60-63.
First generation member John Matthews goes further in his criticism:

the implication was that as soon as the war was over everything would get back to normal, and of course it didn't happen. Instead of things getting better they actually got worse, and then people did start to grumble. Because over in France, which had suffered terribly under the Nazi occupation they abolished rationing within a matter of months, in Britain it went on for 10 years. We were the very last country outside the Iron Curtain to abolish it.\footnote{This shows us how we cannot always think of history in terms of fixed periods such as 1939-45. People’s memories are much more diverse than this and want to talk about topics and instances in their lives that cross over the boundaries historians sometimes use.}

John remembers that it was only after the war that people began to ‘grumble’ about the rationing situation in Britain. His narrative explicitly highlights the fact that he felt people were prepared to sacrifice for the duration of the war but afterwards they were entitled to complain about the shortages experienced. In this extract the hardship John felt was increased when he compared Britain’s situation to other countries, in this instance, France. In the extract below, first generation member Evelyn Slater compares Britain’s post-war situation with that of Germany:

ES. I remember going on holiday, on holiday to Germany, and I was absolutely dumbfounded at the way they've rebuilt Germany and we'd paid for a lot of it.
TM. Yeah.
ES. And yet back home we'd got nothing like it, you know, to think we're supposed to have won the war.
TM. Yeah.
ES. And yet they got all the luxuries out of it like, you know, we were the poor country, you know. I think that sort of you resent, you know that we had to spend a lot of money rebuilding over there and not our own country.\footnote{FG John Matthews, GB, TM, 17.11.08, lines 936-941.}

It is Evelyn’s opinion that the sacrifices the British people were being asked to make after the end of the Second World War were because the British were helping to rebuild Germany. As the war is remembered as a virtuous victory against an evil foe, the German economic recovery, compared to Britain’s economic decline after the Second World War, had been a source of discontent for some. The continuation of sacrifice \footnote{FD Slater/ Davison, GB, TM, 25.8.08, lines 382-390.}
post-war when other European countries were perceived to have recovered is a contentious issue whereas wartime sacrifice is not. However, despite some claims by British people that West Germany was given far greater subsidies after World War II, and Britain’s role as righteous victor was supposedly ignored, Barnett has shown that Britain actually received a third more Marshall Aid than West Germany, $2.7 billion compared to $1.7 billion, but chose to spend it on maintaining their role as a world military power rather than domestic industrial investment.\footnote{C. Barnett, ‘The Wasting of Britain’s Marshall Aid’, 03.03.11, at http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/marshall_01.shtml.}

Kushner even argues that the August 1947 riots against the Jewish community in Britain, now largely erased from popular memory, were due in part to the backdrop of economic hardship and the popular view of the Jewish community as rich and not sharing in the sacrifices that the ‘British’ were making.\footnote{T. Kushner, ‘Anti-Semitism and austerity: the August 1947 riots in Britain’, in P. Panayi (ed), Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, (London, 1996), p.158.} The point I would highlight is that whereas the tone when discussing rationing during the war years was one of accepted sacrifice, as we saw with the examples from the Bell family above, when discussing rationing post-1945 there is a distinct change in attitude that focuses more on the unfairness of the system. This further demonstrates how powerful was the sense of injustice in Britain, real or perceived, over the fact that the sacrifices made during wartime were not now being repudiated after the conflict was over. This feeling is represented strongly in the interviews and would seem to still be a significant issue for the participants in this study.
Responses to Pictures One and Three by the Group Interviewees

The group discussions about pictures one and three reveal some interesting narratives that have been included here in the chapter on sacrifice. They have been included here but they elicited responses from group interviewees that encompass some of the ideas we have discussed in the first two chapters. The responses have been used in tandem with the work already completed on British war memory that emphasises these themes therefore we must be wary of the preconceptions the reading of the secondary literature has brought to this analysis. However, even with these picture stimuli I believe we can find instances where the participants rely on the popular British war memory to articulate their impression of what they perceive is visually recorded.

With picture three the participants commented on the suffering that they saw in the picture and also either found it difficult to place the location or definitively assumed it was not in Britain. In a third generation group interview conducted in a meeting room at a University Halls of Residence, all of the interviewees being students between the ages of 18-20 and born between 1987-88, the interviewees commented:

LS: Because it seems quite like...a lot of... destruction. Is this in Germany? Like blowing up the houses of the Jews or what?
TM: I won’t say but what do you think?
ES: I don’t know why I presume they’re Jews
LS: Yeah so if they’re Jews, then the Germans wouldn’t, because it looks like these houses/
SJ: The allies did bomb Germany didn’t they, obviously Dresden was flattened in World War II.
ES: I don’t know why I’m assuming these are Jews though because/
JB: Why are we assuming it’s not/
SJ: It could be London. 

Here the group again assume that the picture is not Britain, although at the end of the extract this assumption is questioned. However, the most number of references were tagged in the section where a clear association with the picture being overseas was

50 See appendix.
51 GD, TG, GB, TM, 19.3.07, lines 401-411. All participants are university students.
declared, eight sources (out of nine group interviews) and eighteen references in all.
Also in both the above extracts the group finds it difficult to contextualise the suffering
they are seeing within a British setting, so much so that Lou Stevens (LS) and Elizabeth
Smith (ES) even discuss the possibility of the people in the picture being Jewish as this
makes sense to them with what they know of who suffered in Europe. As we discussed
above the acceptance of war hardships, and the focus of the popular memory away from
hardships to an acceptance of suffering may be a contributory factor in this. As could
the defiant attitude to being bombed, that we discussed in chapter one, that the students
cannot find evidence of here. However, this extract from a first generation group
interview conducted in an Elderly Residential Home with participants aged 84-102 and
born between 1904-23, shows another possible reason:

TL: I don’t think that’s in the UK. [number 3]
TM: No. How come?
TL: The way that they’re gathered, there’s no civil defence people round about
or they/ the old ARP people.
TM: Do you remember them from/
TL: At that time I remember London going up in flames.
EA: I do too.
TL: From the engineers depot in Chatham, night time seeing it going up.
[Referring back to no. 3] But that was on the continent, I think. 52

Here Tom Lewis (TL), a retired army officer aged 102, commented that he was sure it
was not the UK because in the picture he could not see some of the iconic imagery
associated with Blitz in Britain. These iconic images are again sections of the ‘defiance’
and ‘sacrifice’ story we have discussed above, people who withstood German bombing
and willingly gave their time to help with the war effort. In the absence of these images,
it appears the interviewees are quick to presume the image was taken abroad. 53 Of
course the responses about the image being abroad could just be the participants

52 GD, FG, GB, TM, 6.6.07, lines 106-114.
53 For balance it should also be noted that the interviewees pointed out that the style of building in the
background of the picture did not conform to the buildings they expected in Britain at that time and this
could also have been a contributing factor to presuming it was abroad.
covering all the options about what they can see or unfamiliar architecture. However, in his research into school history textbooks Crawford has pointed out that ‘photographs generally fall into three categories: people being rescued from bombed buildings or bomb damage being inspected by Churchill or the royal family; people sheltering from the bombing and humorous cartoons and information and propaganda posters’. These examples are very different to the less stoic image of people fleeing that we see in picture three used in this study and that interviewees appear to struggle to contextualise.

In contrast picture six was consistently identified as being of a British context, there was little doubt it was taken abroad, and interviewees associated the figure in the picture in a positive way, helping to protect Britain; this contrasts with the comments relating to picture three. One of the second generation groups, interviewed in an participant’s home, all aged between 42-62 and born 1946-66, remarked:

EH. Yeah, he looks British yeah. The helmet looks a British helmet.
GC. It does actually look like a poster thing doesn't it, like it is/
KL. Look how we looked after you.
EH. Your country needs you.
GC. You'd expect that very polished English accent to come over saying something like.55

Here they are using their knowledge of British wartime helmets to identify the person, and other groups did use similar knowledge to identify the scene as British, but they also associate the image with positive characteristics of the British during the war as he is helping to defend and protect the country. The impression for Grace Campbell (GC), aged 42, a housewife, is that the person in the picture would a well-spoken person thus indicating that because of what he was doing he was also a good person incorporating all the best characteristics of what it was to be British. In another second generation interview, conducted in a participant’s living room, with six interviewees aged 50-59

55 GD, SG, GB, TM, 19.7.09, lines 287-292.
and born 1947-57, Des King, aged 59, a carpenter, commented that he thought the soldier was ‘part of an anti-aircraft battery I think. He could even be/ that could even be navy because it might be, that might be a duffle coat he’s wearing. Could be on board a ship because they had those on board ships.”56 Here Des does correctly identify that it was a picture taken of a sailor in the Navy, however, many of the references were linked with identifying the soldier as British due to defence and especially defence from air attack.57 The key difference to draw from pictures three and six is that one of them, number three, shows a scene outside of the British war experience and the participants struggle to identify and contextualise the scene. Whilst picture six which shows an image much more suited to the popular British war memory, the interviewees are much more confident expressing their opinion of a British soldier doing his duty. Indeed, picture six is focussed upon much less in general in the group interviews because I believe it does not challenge the participants, they identify it as a British soldier and because he is seemingly doing what they would expect they do not spend a great deal of time discussing this image.

**Summary**

As was mentioned before ‘Sacrifice’ and ‘Defiance’ are two topics that can overlap somewhat. For instance, it is of course highly probable that after a sacrifice has been made a person may need to be defiant about having to make that sacrifice. However, whilst bearing this in mind it is important for us to try to break down the different sections resulting from the interviews to gain a better depth of understanding of each. We looked further here at the lack of any strong victimisation in the interviews and the matter-of-fact descriptions that the participants used to describe many areas of

56 GD, SG, GB, TM, 20.7.07, lines 138-140.
57 Five references from five interviews identified it as the Navy, nine references from eight interviews also discussed the soldier as a member of the Home Guard.
hardship during the war. We discussed how this could well be because during the war sacrifice was expected from the British people and this was evident in wartime propaganda. Although we did look at examples where more subtlety not all people indicated they would have been quite so willing to sacrifice for the war effort if they had been offered jobs they did not like. Sacrifice was highly significant when participants mentioned rationing, something the whole country took part in and it is remembered positively as an opportunity to help with the war effort. However, post-1945 this was not always the case and sacrifices after the war were not necessarily considered fair and the narratives were less positive. Finally, pictures three and six from the group interviews were correctly identified by the groups as concerned their location but the reasons given can perhaps give us an insight into the iconic imagery British people expect to see if a picture similar to three was taken in Britain.
Chapter 3- Unity and Collective Fortitude

From Angus Calder’s seminal work entitled *The People’s War* published in 1969 through to the recent BBC oral history archive also entitled *People’s War* the idea of crediting the character of the British people as being a driving factor behind overall victory in the Second World War has long been established in British memory. Furthermore, during the war propaganda films also sought to promote the unity of the British people. Higson argues productions ‘such as *Millions Like Us, The Gentle Sex* and *The Bells Go Down* construct a specific image of the nation as a community of people united, almost regardless of class, in a common cause; they each deal with a group of people who became representative of “the people” as a whole.’¹ The 1941 Ministry of Information film *Ordinary People* contains many examples of the people of London pulling together to help in times of need: a lady takes in a mother and daughter who have been bombed out, and a taxi driver lends his cab to another driver for the night so he can make some money after his cab was destroyed by a bomb.² This view is also promoted in contemporary British education as Crawford, in a survey of school history textbooks, notes the emphasis on community spirit and quotes questions from the textbooks such as “During the war, everyone was equal and there was a community spirit” and “Some people say that the Blitz brought out the best in people”. Suggest reasons for this.³ The quote from the above extract does not ask school children to question the assertions it presents, they are an accepted fact, rather it simply seeks reasons why the British behaved like this.

However, some scholars have questioned whether the idea of the People’s War is all encompassing of the British popular memory. For instance, it is Connelly’s contention that the dominance of the Conservative Party in British politics in the post-war period has led to a move away from the story of the People’s War to that dominated by a recognition of Churchill and strong leadership.\(^4\) It is useful to present the analysis from the interviews in this study alongside the work already undertaken by scholars. Whilst I agree broadly with the arguments presented by Connelly, the evidence from the interviews suggests that the willingness to remember the war in terms of the role of the ordinary people is still strong and, as this chapter will demonstrate, even judging the role of British war leaders on how in tune they were with public opinion. Noakes also notes that commemorations of the war in Britain are ‘imbalanced towards the servicemen (with emphasis on men)’ and highlights the fact that ‘no national memorial to the civilian dead of the war exists, as yet, in Britain’.\(^5\) I would agree with this statement yet the bias in these commemorative occasions has not transpired into a similar bias in the interviews conducted, indeed, as we shall see in chapter four memory of familial combat experience is limited compared to other areas of the war, particularly the Home Front and role of ordinary people. As before, elements in this chapter will overlap with the areas covered by the first two chapters as all these topics intertwine to create the British war memory. However, whereas what defined sacrifice was a willingness to do something that the people did not particularly want to, what defines the narratives that focus on the spirit of the British people is altogether a more positive experience, something that was done as a matter of personal pride rather than as something to be endured. In this chapter we shall examine this community spirit, this


\(^5\) L. Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity*, (London, 1998), p.3. Italics are original authors.
will include how Dunkirk is discussed, the role of the collective over the individual, perceptions on shelters, how evacuation was viewed and how rationing may have been mis-used. The chapter will also examine the impression of Britain’s war-leaders and those in command in relation to the people, and finally we will include an example of a family memory of looting.

**Community Spirit**

The interviewees highlighted the community spirit during the war and the fact that people were always willing to help one another. Approaching the research with this area of public memory prominent from scholars such as Connelly this is perhaps what was expected to be found. Nevertheless, this was recorded in thirty eight examples from twenty four interviews and twenty four examples were from female first generation members. This is perhaps not surprising because of their presence on the Home Front during the Second World War. However, only ten of these examples cover both the second and third generations, which, considering the significance of everybody helping out in the secondary material about British war memory, it is surprising that more stories and specific examples are not present within later generations. One such example is from the Walker family. First generation member Nancy was mentioned in the last chapter but in the examples below there are also comments from her daughter Lara, a teaching assistant aged 46 and born 1962, and granddaughter Chelsea, a travel agent aged 24 and born 1983. Firstly, Nancy commented:

NW. My father, my father was very kind and good natured to everyone and used to go out in the evenings for a drink at the local pub and he’d come walking back, and of course there was bombing every night nearly and somebody would be bombed out nearly every night you know in the early days of the war. And he'd come walking in with somebody and my mother would say ‘oh my God, who's he got with him this time somebody else come to stay', and he'd walk in with this person trailing behind, sometimes it would be a couple, and he'd say ‘These people have been bombed out they've got nowhere to sleep can they stay
Here? and me mother used to say ‘I suppose so’ [laughs]. But it was the camaraderie you know that we had all in together/
TM. Yeah.
NW. And it was quite nice.⁶

Here, Nancy tells a story of not just one specific instance where her father helped someone out but the memory suggests numerous occasions on which her father would bring people bombed out of their homes back to their family home to stay. Nancy hints that perhaps her mother was not always too keen to accept these visitors but always relented without too much trouble, allowing the guests to stay. Finally, Nancy finishes by universalising the spirit of the story just told by commenting that the ‘camaraderie’ was ‘all in together’ indicating that her family were not the only people to carry out such acts during the war. Her daughter Lara knows that ‘some people in Kenilworth including my grandparents took some people in that were homeless and, you know, for a short time… I can’t remember anything else that she said about that time particularly but I think that that had been mentioned, yeah.’⁷ Here, the story has far less detail and Lara admits that she cannot remember much more but repeats the main elements of the narrative in that her parents, including others, used to take in people around Kenilworth who had lost their homes. Third generation member Chelsea did not know about the story in her interview but the idea of everyone helping each other out was brought up and discussed again during the family interview:

NW. I mean if somebody knocked your door today and said ‘here’s a tin of spam’ [laughter at the idea]. But everybody sort of came in/
CW. It was just more simpler, just plain and simple, that's what we haven't got any of have we?
LW. It's a competition nowadays isn't it?
CW. Nothing’s simple.
NW. Everything was… very simple and nice and that sort of/
CW. Yeah easy.⁸

⁶ FG Nancy Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 530-540.
⁷ SG Lara Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 46-49.
⁸ FD Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 203-210.
Here Lara and Chelsea respond to the idea of helping other people out as a positive response and indicative of the era. In their respective interviews Lara admits that she did not cover World War II at school and Chelsea notes that whilst she did some topics on it she can remember nothing about the Second World War from her education.\(^9\) Thus the attitudes expressed here do not appear to be influenced from education but from elsewhere, particularly the family. Especially in the family interview Chelsea is reacting to what her grandmother is saying. We will look more closely at the idea of nostalgia for the war era in chapter four but here it is interesting to note the way in which a discussion about a specific example (in this case they were discussing people combining food together for a wedding) quickly evolves to be generally accepted as what was normal during World War II, this is an uncontroversial topic and accepted readily by the later generations, such is the strength of the public memory.

Throughout the interviews the participants seemed to wish to discuss what was personal to them rather than incidents, even major national events, which happened that they were not personally involved with. This is perhaps most striking when the issue of Dunkirk was broached within the interviews. Dunkirk and the ‘Dunkirk Spirit’ are noted as key components of the British war memory and of everyone helping each other. Connelly has commented that Dunkirk marked a moment when, despite defeat, great British character came through to rescue so many, and of the great determination to continue the fight thereafter to ensure a British way of life in the face of Nazi tyranny.\(^10\) It would have been expected from this that Dunkirk would have a prominent place in the interviews and been discussed at length. However, the participants only elaborated on this topic in nine of the interviews and there are eleven examples of this from those interviews. This includes six examples from the first generation, three from

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\(^9\) See SG Lara Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 83-83, and TG Chelsea Walker, GB, TM, 8.05.08, lines 101-104.

\(^10\) Connelly, *We Can Take It!*., pp.54-55.
the second generation and two from the third generation, indicating that there is some repetition of the story involving Dunkirk within the family when it is mentioned. The most striking feature of the examples from the interviews however, is that Dunkirk is only elaborated on if there was a direct link to the event such as seeing the boats or knowing somebody involved. For instance, first generation Nancy Walker saw some of the boats leave and this narrative makes up 3.46 per cent of her overall interview transcript, whereas another first generation witness Richard Cox who did not have any connection only briefly mentions the ‘euphoria’ surrounding the occasion and this takes up just 0.43 per cent of his interview transcript and he then proceeds to discuss D-Day rather than Dunkirk because he knew somebody involved in that.\(^\text{11}\) Thus, despite the focus on Dunkirk in scholarly works, such as Connelly, about the Second World War, and events in popular culture\(^\text{12}\) it was a little talked about experience in the interviews conducted for this study. For participants with no personal link to Dunkirk it either did not seem important enough, or they did not know enough about it, to have anything to say on the matter. I should also point out that the interviewees were asked for their personal war memories; perhaps they did not want to discuss Dunkirk precisely because they were not involved and did not want to contravene the limits set by the interviewer. However, this still did not preclude them from discussing hearing about the evacuation from the radio or conversations that they may have had or overheard at the time.

When the subject was discussed, perhaps not surprisingly, it was the notion of the little ships and the ordinary person sailing across the channel to help that was talked about. It was JB Priestley’s broadcast on the BBC after Dunkirk that emphasised the

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\(^\text{11}\) FG, Nancy Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 494-507. And FG, Richard Cox, GB, TM, 30.1.09, lines 159-160. Percentages of interview time taken up by an extract are calculated by NVivo.

\(^\text{12}\) One only has to look at the recent commemorations regarding the 70\(^{\text{th}}\) anniversary of Dunkirk. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/10188650.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/10188650.stm) and [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/world-war-2/7783175/Ceremony-marks-70th-anniversary-of-Dunkirk-evacuation.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/world-war-2/7783175/Ceremony-marks-70th-anniversary-of-Dunkirk-evacuation.html) are good articles in the media.
‘little boats’ that had snatched ‘glory out of defeat’ for Britain.\textsuperscript{13} This image has endured despite many scholars pointing out since that the majority of soldiers were actually carried away by the Royal Navy.\textsuperscript{14} As first generation member Audrey Bell commented ‘But when all those boats were in the bay we did think that the Germans would bomb them but obviously they kept it quite quiet and obviously they all went over and even they had little boats that used to in normal days give children, well anybody, rides around the bay, and they were called the Skylark, and even all these little Skylark boats went over, if they could only bring back six people.’\textsuperscript{15} Audrey discusses only the smaller boats as her memories of how people got back from across the Channel. She highlights the fact that it did not matter how many people could be brought back but that the point was to get as many as possible back. It is the image of the little boats that has survived in personal memory, of the smaller boats helping to evacuate the beaches, and of many Britons playing their part, rather than an equal emphasis for the Navy and their flotilla of larger, more professional vessels.

The way a more collective emphasis is highlighted in the British war memory of World War II even had five interviewees play down their own experience of the Blitz in favour of acknowledging the suffering felt by others. For instance Beth Clark, witness to the Coventry Blitz, remarked that ‘I realise now that Liverpool had a terrible time of it didn’t they. They were almost flattened. And there’s quite a few, like you say London, I mean the East End of London, the docks, it was all the docks that they were going for wasn’t it.’\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, Maureen Nicholls, a witness to the Bristol Blitz, also commented ‘It must have been dreadful in London but I mean we had it bad here
but not to the extent that they had in London.’\(^{17}\) Here, both interviewees make a point to emphasise how their own experiences were not as bad as other areas they had heard about. Nicholas uses her research of wartime propaganda on the BBC to argue that ‘since an attitude of stoicism had become such an important feature of the British reaction to hardships and the Blitz, audiences felt uncomfortable with “over-done” self-praise’.\(^{18}\) Much like the examples above the interviewees have encapsulated their own experiences into one more rounded that includes the broader nation.

This can be seen in a further six examples from five interviews where heroic deeds are commented on by interviewees but the people described in the narratives are never exalted above the rest of the population for their acts. Parris argues that the Second World War blurred the lives between combatants and civilians and so propagandists began to personify the entire population as heroic.\(^{19}\) In the extract below first generation witness Joan Dyer (JD) is discussing with her daughter Wendy Wright (WW), aged 61 and born 1947 and a retired civil servant like her mother, about an uncle who was awarded a medal for bravery:

**JD.** My mother's brother, he lived in London, and he had the/ a medal from the Queen for rescuing people, he held up a floor with his back to get some children out from a building, a burning building, and he had the medal in London. That was Arthur, my mum's brother.

**WW.** I'm sure there was a lot of heroes weren't there in the war.

**TM.** Yeah.

**JD.** There was, yes.

**WW.** People did things I suppose they didn't even think about/

**JD.** He did, he crawled under the rubbish and he was holding up the parts of the floor boarding I suppose and that rescued the children while he was in there and it was burning around him, and he got a medal for that.

**TM.** Was he a fireman or/

**JD.** No, he was just an ordinary civilian, no just an ordinary civilian, he was yes. He must have went out to help I suppose, like everybody else in London I suppose they all turned out.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{17}\) FG Maureen Nicholls, GB, TM, 18.6.08, lines 326-327.

\(^{18}\) Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, p.139.


\(^{20}\) FD Dyer/ Wright, GB, TM, 5.6.08, lines 338-352.
It is interesting to note that the first reaction to this news from Wendy is to assume that, rather than her mother’s uncle’s actions being remarkable, she comments only that there were ‘lots of heroes’ during the war. Her mother’s reaction is to agree and even after going into further detail about the actions of her uncle, pointing out not only that he saved children but also did it whilst ‘it was burning around him’, she also supposes that this must have a normal reaction and that the people of London ‘all turned out’. Wendy was born in 1947 and comments at the beginning of her interview that she feels she was told a lot about the war because it was still ‘fresh’ in peoples’ minds when she was a child and also that watching films with her father was an opportunity to discuss the war as a child. Therefore she is remembering the war from a position much closer to the actual events than some other second generation witnesses and grew up watching war films from the immediate post-war era. It is Fox’s argument that from the 1940s onwards films in Britain emphasised the hero of the Blitz who ‘was characterised by his identity and demonstrated that ordinary people were the heroes of the war, their individualism at the centre of bravery and courage’. However, Rose furthers this idea a little and writes that ‘individuality, not individualism was key to wartime masculinity’. By this she means that individual heroic acts to help the war effort were prized but in the context of being part of the collective and therefore one’s actions were never taken for personal glory. This was the same whether in the armed forces or on the Home Front. She also points out that wartime stories would always highlight the fact that the hero was an ordinary person thus encouraging others to follow in his

21 SG Wendy Wright, GB, TM, 5.6.08, lines 16-22.
22 Ibid., 683-685.
footsteps. The extract was analysed after these scholarly works had been examined and we cannot ignore the effect this may have had on interpretation, however, in the example above the interviewees do indeed appear to value the individual act of heroism within the context of the collective British war effort.

Shelters and Sheltering from Bombs

The experience of sheltering from bombing raids has been characterised as showing the good spirit of the British people during the Blitz ever since wartime propaganda. The approach to sheltering is epitomised in *Ordinary People* (1941) when one of the characters welcomes another to the communal shelter by remarking that ‘We’re a jolly crowd. In fact, we quite enjoy ourselves’. The popular idea of Londoners using the Underground is expressed in seven examples from seven different interviews. Here in the Smith family interview first generation Jenny Smith (JS) and second generation Peter Hartley (PH) discuss this idea:

PH: Up in London, of course, they used the subways which was ideal.
JS: Oh yes.
PH: Entertainers used to go down there and entertain, all that sort of thing.
JS: Yeah the comradeship was marvellous then weren’t they.

Peter states with confidence that in London they used to use the Underground (or ‘subways’). This confidence can be shown in the way he prefixes the statement about the use of the Underground with ‘of course’. Here, he is not looking for anyone to help him confirm the comment but is offering it as a statement of incontrovertible fact. He is of course correct that some Londoners did use the Underground for shelter but, as has been pointed out by historians since, the number that used them is small compared to the significance the Underground has taken on in the memory of the London Blitz in

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26 ‘Ordinary People’ (1941), *Land of Promise*.
27 FD Smith/ Wilkinson/ Hartley, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 336-339.
Britain. However, this is not how Peter presents what he knows, he seems to be indicating that all Londoners, or at least the vast majority, used the Underground. Not only this but he also promotes a very positive image of sheltering in the Underground by suggesting that the people were kept entertained during the bombing and Jenny agrees with by stating that in general the ‘comradeship was marvellous’. Jenny and Peter are from Kent, outside of London, and so have repeated the popular memory to suppose that this was the experience of the majority of people. However, if we compare their expectations to the experiences of John Matthews that was discussed at the end of the first chapter we can see a marked contrast in how the popular memory, used by those not present, can differ remarkably from an individual’s personal contact with the event.

Other positive experiences of shelters and light-hearted narratives are present in the interviews, six examples from six separate interviews recorded this type of representation. Below second generation member Brett Miller (BM), a residential manager, asks his mother-in-law Joan Miller, a housewife, about her experience in the shelter during bombing raids:

BM. So what did you do in the air raid shelters?
JM. We used to sing A-B-C-D-E-F-G and then somebody used to say a nursery rhyme and then you used to sing the alphabet and somebody else used to say a nursery rhyme and then you used to sit and play games, you used to play snakes and ladders and Ludo.29

This memory of sheltering that Joan relays to her son-in-law is clearly very positive and conveys a good recollection of childhood times spent sheltering despite the threat of bombs. It is something that her daughter Lara was aware of and had repeated in her interview. Discussing emotions that her mother may have felt she commented that ‘they knew what was going on outside and they were only kids, so it was to try and make it

29 FD Miller, GB, TM, 26.2.09, lines 409-413.
more of a community feel, you know you went down there and they had things to do whilst they were down there, so whether they played games or cards or/ you know to take the time away until the noise came to tell that it was safe to go back.'\textsuperscript{30} Here she repeats the playing of games but adds the idea of a ‘community feel’, not explicitly mentioned by the first generation. Thus the general feel of having a pleasant experience in the shelter has been acknowledged and then added upon by Lara with the idea of community and togetherness. This extra element is much closer to the image portrayed in Second World War propaganda though we cannot be sure that is where Lara has gained this impression from, she does not mention seeing anything explicitly about this and did not study World War II at school.

However, further evidence of the shelter being viewed in a positive light can be seen from second generation Wendy Wright interview where she discussed a trip to Berlin where she visited a shelter in the city:

\begin{quote}
we went to Berlin and went down to one of the shelters, there's a/ you know you can actually go down into a mock shelter that the Germans obviously had. And I mean it was a big, great big like I don't know, much bigger than a Tesco superstore kind of thing, with beds and showers and everything, doctors surgery you name it, it was all prepared, where they all went you know. I don't know whether it was just normal people, I think it was people who had money and whatever because obviously not everybody could get down.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

This comment did not fit into any of the different categories under ‘sheltering’ in the analysis and so was categorised separately. However, it is worth including and is interesting because of how Wendy describes who used the shelter. She describes being impressed with the size and amenities available in the shelter but then assumes that the shelter was only for use by the wealthy. This is in stark contrast to how all of the narratives are discussed when the interviewees mention British shelters, class division is

\textsuperscript{30} SG Lara Miller, GB, TM, 26.2.09, lines 47-51.
\textsuperscript{31} SG Wendy Wright, GB, TM, 5.6.08, lines 298-304.
not mentioned in favour of an emphasis on equality. Whilst I have found no evidence of a general policy in Nazi Germany to segregate the population by wealth for shelter provision I could not follow further this specific instance because Wendy could not remember the exact place in Berlin she visited. However, it is interesting that Wendy should choose to emphasise the division because it is the opposite of how the popular memory remembers shelters as friendly places full of camaraderie during the Blitz.

Nevertheless, not all of the shelter narratives focussed on this positive collective experience of the people. There were eight examples over six interviews where the interviewees expressed less than idealistic memories of sheltering. These are very similar numbers to those recorded for ‘Positive Shelter Stories’ above. However, interestingly these examples all came from the first generation, who had experienced sheltering, rather than from the subsequent generations. This would indicate that whereas the second and third generations are prone to repeat the collective memory of the shelter being a happy place, as we may have expected from the secondary literature, those who actually experienced it have stronger recollections of the negative aspects.

First generation witness Mary Pole commented that ‘In the shelter there was twenty or something, there was a lot of people. We were quite happy to go under the stairs.’ Here Mary is discussing the reasons why her family choose not to go to the communal shelter and is expressively dismissing the idea of wanting to share with others. Indeed, the fact that there were ‘a lot of people’ is the reason she preferred to go under the stairs, shunning the idea of the camaraderie of the shelter. Furthermore, in a first

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32 Though in Britain this was not always true, see P. Piratin, Our Flag Stays Red, (London, 2006, illustrated edition) for a detailed account of the British Communist Party’s takeover of the London Savoy air raid shelter in protest of not having adequate shelters in the East End.
33 There is an old atomic bunker in Berlin that is open to the public, details at [http://www.visitberlin.de/en/spot/the-story-of-berlin](http://www.visitberlin.de/en/spot/the-story-of-berlin), however, I do not know if Wendy was referencing this. If she was then the argument is still valid because she had confused it to be a Second World War shelter and was discussing it in this way.
34 FG Mary Pole, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 158-159.
generation group interview Anne McCall remarked about the communal shelter she went to ‘Do you remember that it was just, how we were ever safe, it was dripping through water and you used to/ we thought we were safe.’\(^{35}\) Again, rather than positive memories of songs or games as mentioned in the above examples Anne questions the safety of the shelters and by commenting that they were ‘dripping through with water’ the impression is also given of a damp environment that would not have been very pleasant to spend the night. We mentioned earlier about sounds being more pertinent to the first generation, in this case the contemporary witness memory recalls the damp environment. However, in this case it is not just the sensory information missing from later generations but any negative views on sheltering at all. The fact that the younger generations do not mention this perhaps highlights the fact that such representations are omitted in favour of the more positive popular memory.

**Evacuation**

In memory of children evacuated from major cities one would expect to encounter narratives that evoked the idea of Britain as one large community willing to help one another. Indeed, in seventeen examples over nine interviews we do find evidence of positive recollections of evacuation being expressed. For instance, first generation member Paul Clark stated ‘that [it] didn’t bother me at all, leaving Coventry didn’t bother me at all, because it was all countryside where we were you know. Used to roam over the fields all that it was some real freedom we had, never had that before, and go birds nesting and everything you know what lads are.’\(^ {36}\) Paul discusses his time as an evacuee in a very wistful and idealistic way. The idea of large areas of countryside to roam and play in is obviously very appealing. First generation Maureen

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\(^{35}\) GD, FG, GB, TM, 18.4.09, lines 646-647.

\(^{36}\) FG Paul Clark, GB, TM, 25.1.09, lines 30-33.
Nicholls tells her family about a life-changing experience her friend had when evacuated. She recalled her friend was from ‘quite a poor family and so she was evacuated and she was put with a doctor and his family, and the doctor sent her to the private school that his own daughter went to and through her going to the private school she went on to study and became a teacher, and was the Headmistress. I mean it really altered her whole life.’ This is not only a positive memory but also incorporates the idea of everyone helping each other during the war. It reflects well on the character of the people who looked after Maureen’s friend during the war and their response to having a child evacuated onto them in giving her a higher quality of education than she would otherwise have had.

However, not all the recollections are like this and evacuation is actually an area where the narratives disagree in a large number from the public memory of everyone helping out and ‘pulling together’ that we may well have expected to discover from the secondary literature. Indeed, seventeen examples from fourteen interviews express overtly negative experiences of evacuation. In the example below second generation member Lara Walker discusses an experience she knew from her father:

It affected him quite badly, they lived in/ they were from the East End and they, there was eight of them, and the younger two stayed in London with the parents and the older children were evacuated. Dad and his brothers were evacuated to a farm they were treated very badly, they were put to work. My dad ran away, tried to get back and find his parents, get back to London and they’d moved. He said he just knocked on a neighbour's door and he found them, and he said he would have rather have been with his parents.

As opposed to Paul Clark’s rather idyllic memory of the countryside in the example above, Lara recalls a much harsher life on a farm that her father experienced where he was treated as cheap labour and eventually ran away. Lara’s narrative is typical of all

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37 FD Nicholls/ McCarthy, GB, TM, 18.6.08, lines 240-244.
38 Lara’s father had already passed away when the interview was conducted with her mother as the first generation witness. However, as with many interviews, participants often discussed both parents/grandparents when talking about wartime experiences.
39 SG Lara Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 147-153.
the recollections about negative aspects linked to evacuation in that blame is not attributed to individuals, no-one recalls or mentions a specific person who treated evacuees harshly, but a bad experience is almost described as a symptom of the situation. In the negative evacuation narratives the person who treated the children badly remains faceless rather than being called to account, or ‘named and shamed’ as it were. Lara only mentions that her father and uncles were sent to a farm where ‘they were put to work’ as if this is just one of the possible hazards people had to accept when being evacuated. We must be careful not over emphasise this point to declare that people did not proportion blame necessarily because of the collective attitude towards each other during the Second World War. It could be just as much that the names were not so important and forgotten. Furthermore, in the example above from Maureen Nicholls she also does not mention the name of the Doctor who gave her friend a good education.

However, I would like to explore the idea of subtle levels of distress further in the narratives. The idea that the distress of evacuation was subtly mentioned was used as a category in the analysis and was recorded on forty six occasions in twenty five of the interviews. In the overwhelming majority of the occasions it was recorded within the first generation, with thirty six out of the forty six recordings being taken from first generation narratives. However, in the Bell family the subject was present over all three generations and this makes them a good example to look at. Here, first generation witness Audrey Bell discusses evacuees arriving at her home:

AB. But the bombing hadn't started when the evacuees came down that hadn't started then. And two of the children came with shaved/ their heads shaved completely because they'd got lice/ fleas.
TM. Oh right.
AB. And we thought ‘goodness me’ you know where have they been, poor little mites.  

40 FG Audrey Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 407–412.
Audrey mentions that the children who came to stay with her had head lice and this is obviously something that she has remembered and affected her sufficiently to want to re-tell. However, the tone of the narrative changes in the last sentence where she begins by expressing shock but then highlights that this shock was only because of her family’s general sympathy for their plight. Her daughter Erin does talk in more general negative tones than her mother:

I mean I don’t know, all I hear is the recipient end of having them in the house, continually. And you know there was one girl that was boy mad, you know so my poor old Nan had to cope with that. There was one that came with head lice, one used to cry and rock herself to sleep. You know and they're all in a little bedroom that was designed for one. You know it wasn’t as if they lived in a mansion, I've seen their bungalow, it was only a little bungalow in Bournemouth.\[41\]

Erin highlights several problems that her mother’s family had to cope with, including the head lice mentioned by her mother, and then tells us that this was despite their bungalow only being small. She does not criticise evacuation outright however, and earlier in her interview she also mentions this by saying ‘the evacuees… had head lice and my mum’s very particular about that sort of thing [TM laughs] and you know things like that I suppose yeah she used to tell me about that. But.. not with an unhappy/I mean my parents never ever went on about how dreadful the war was.’\[42\] Here, after discussing the evacuees with head lice she comments how her parents never complained about ‘how dreadful the war was’. Furthermore, Audrey’s granddaughter Gemma also commented:

GB. Yeah, like that. And I mean my Nan obviously remembers having the evacuees with her from London in her house. And obviously having to share her bedroom and her life really with these people. So you see for me now that's quite weird thing to sort of think about strange people coming into your house and living and/

TM. Yeah.

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\[41\] SG Erin Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 338-343.
\[42\] Ibid., 35-38.
GB. Just quite, quite a strange idea.\textsuperscript{43}

Gemma mentions the evacuees and her grandmother having to share ‘her life’ when they arrived which hints at distress. Not only this but Gemma refers to the evacuees as ‘these people’ which is in stark contrast to the rather more empathetic way her grandmother discussed their situation in her narrative. Yet, like her mother, Gemma does not overtly criticise the evacuation, preferring instead to note that she felt it was simply ‘weird’ and a ‘strange idea’. The topic has obviously been raised within the Bell family as three generations know the evacuees story. During the interviews the participants commented that memories would come out as ‘stories’ that first generation family members would impart at particular, relevant, instances. Although, Gemma did comment that ‘the stories that her and my grandad have told me have all been sort of, of jolly sort of outings and experiences’.\textsuperscript{44} In the analysis here it is argued that the comments by the Bell family do exhibit subtle tones of a more negative attitude to the evacuation experience. However, they do not fully criticise the system because it would expose the family memory to be in opposition to the metanarrative of the British people pulling together to help and showing the correct spirit during World War II. Once more we must bear in mind the expectations of conducting the analysis in the context of the existing secondary material which stresses the spirit of unity within Britain.

It is also the case that this type of narrative was present in those who sought help and had to spend time evacuated to someone else’s home. In the example below first generation member Frieda Reid discusses a time she had to go and stay with a family member because her home had been destroyed by bomb damage:

FR… But there were 17 of us altogether and we/ me mum/ I think he only got one bedroom like so they put me mum and dad in there. And we all/ that's how we was.

\textsuperscript{43} TG Gemma Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 26-31.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 10-11.
TM. How was that? How did you find/
FR. Well, not very good was it. Some of the people we didn't really know but I
mean they were in the same predicament is what we was really so you've got to
help one another haven’t you, then like you know. It's a sort of a thing you do
then.45

Frieda mentions how many people were staying and that the homeowner only had one
bedroom hinting at cramped conditions but it is only when further asked about the
conditions that she admits ‘it was not very good’. However, even then she does not
elaborate on that but states that people had to help one another. In the family discussion
below the interviewer asked third generation member Sue Reid, a nurse aged 26 and
born 1982 who could not remember studying any World War II at school, what she
thought about her grandmother sharing with seventeen people:

TM. What you think about having to share your room with 17 other people?
You know you don't know them.
SR. Yeah, well it's what you guys did it isn't it. I think people/ especially like
today people just don't realise what people went through.46

This was the first time Sue had heard this story as she didn’t know many of her
grandmother’s experiences in her individual interview. Frieda did admit that doing the
interview had made ‘things come to mind’ so perhaps her World War II experiences
were not something she had considered or readily discussed within her family.47

Nevertheless, rather than focussing on any hardships or problems Sue’s immediate
response is to take the lead from her grandmother’s attitude and she highlights that this
was just what people did. She does hint at the fact it may have been difficult by saying
that ‘today people just don’t realise what people went through’ but this in itself is a
mark of respect for the character of the people during the war as opposed to a focus on
the frictions that may have been caused by evacuation. In the analysis here, conducted
with the metanarative of British unity in mind, the hints to these frictions are noted as

45 FG Frieda Reid, GB, TM, 20.2.09, lines 102-108.
46 FD Reid, GB, TM, 20.2.09, lines 98-101.
47 Ibid., 260.
present in the majority of interviews about evacuation but they often get superseded by the more popular memory of people willing to help out and remaining upbeat and cheerful throughout. A reason for this could be the idea of ‘composure’ we mentioned in the Introduction. Although the memories about evacuation are negative the interviewees understand that this is not the popular way it is remembered and so rely on the context of unity with which to express their opinions so that they are understood and their memories and opinions are accepted by their audience, the interviewer.

**Deliberately Gaining Extra Rations**

We have already discussed rationing under the idea of sacrifice but the other side of cutting back is the fact that the people aimed to help themselves and improve their own diet. Perhaps chief amongst this idea in the popular memory is the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign and the fact people supplemented their rations through growing their own vegetables and keeping their own animals where possible. Fourteen examples from eleven interviews mentioned some aspect of English peoples’ ownership for their food supply with eight of these examples from the first generation, five from the second generation and one from the third generation. However, this is a common thread in British war memory and has been discussed at length by scholars and within popular culture. What is interesting for this study, when we consider the focus on unity, is finding that a significant number of people admit to some small scale black market type activity to gain extra food considering this is in complete contrast to the idea of fairness as we have just seen and equal sacrifice mentioned in the previous chapter. Smith has noted from his study of public record documents that the black market was believed to be widespread and highly organised by contemporaries.  

cautious about being effectively able to determine its breath and, whilst the Ministry of Food had 550 local enforcement officers to enforce the rationing system, Dewey contends that the issue is somewhat clouded by what he terms the ‘grey market’ for minor infringements such as shopkeepers giving a little extra and showing favouritism. Nevertheless, it carries with it a stigma and connotations of the ‘spiv’ who was out only for personal gain rather than doing his bit for the British war effort. Yet thirty-five examples from nineteen interviews were recorded where participants discussed getting extra that they were not entitled to. Although the majority of these were discussed by the first generation with nineteen examples, it was also evident in the second generation (nine examples) and the third generation (four examples).

First generation witness Beth Clark recalled that ‘When I came out of school I always used to have to go on an errand, shopping for her, because by this time she had your Uncle and she was quite busy, and she’d send me in for things without the ration book [laughs] and more often than not I was lucky enough’. What Beth is inferring when she comments that ‘more often than not I was lucky enough’ is that she was able to get goods from the shops without the ration book. Her mother had deliberately sent Beth to the shops without the book in an attempt to get extra food without using all her ration coupons. In this, her individual interview, we can see Beth takes the whole issue of getting a little extra light heartedly and laughs at her mother’s actions.

However, Beth’s daughters display a slightly different tone when they are

50 The remaining three examples not counted for were in family discussions where no leader or opinion former to the discussion could be identified.
51 FG Beth Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 157-160. Beth says ‘your Uncle’ in this section because she is related to the interviewer.
discussing the idea that their family may have acquired extra rations. Sara commented that ‘I believe my Gran did substitute a few sweet vouchers for other things, she always tried to get the best she could and did a bit of haggling and bargaining, which I imagine they all did then. No it had to be done in some way’. She accepts that there was ‘haggling and bargaining’ but suggests the mitigating circumstances that ‘they all did’ and it ‘had to be done’. Similarly, Jane remarked:

I know my gran used to swap all the kids sweet rations for butter and things like that. So the kids never had any sweets because she wanted food on the table for her man. So she would do that, that was perfectly, that was all above board, but she did used to do the coupon swapping thing. And I imagine a lot of people did, and then there was other people who got things off the black market, although, I don’t know, maybe gran’s told you differently, but I don’t know if my family ever did anything like that. But I would imagine if it came along they would have. I’m not saying that they wouldn’t do it on some sort of moral ground if there was a joint of meat and they could pay for it, they didn’t need their coupons, they’d do it, I know them well enough to know that they would do that. [laughs]

Jane also comments that she knows her grandmother used to swap rations but stresses that this was ‘all above board’ and, like Sara, also suggests that her family were not alone in doing this. She also entertains the possibility that her family would not have turned down the opportunity to pay for extra food rather than use the ration coupons if it was offered and does not seem too perturbed by this idea and does not criticise it.

However, when the topic is mentioned again during the family interview the following conversation occurs:

TM: No-one seemed to know the story of sending you to the shop without any tokens in the book.
BC: With the ration book but with the weeks supply already gone. No you know what gran was like Jane, she was a conniver in some respects wasn’t she!

Beth (1st generation), Jane (2nd generation), and Tim Clark (3rd generation) were interviewed in June 2007 (see bibliography). Later Beth’s husband (Paul) and other daughter (Sara) wished to be interviewed also and this was done in January 2009 (see bibliography). There is obviously some crossover from Jane, Sara, and Tim’s interviews to both of their parents/ grandparents and not just the ones they were being interviewed with in June 2007 and January 2009. Indeed, Beth sat in and contributed to the family discussion in the interviews conducted in 2009 because it was felt she could add to the debate.

SG Sara Clark, GB, TM, 25.1.09, lines 331-333.
SG Jane Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 184-194.
JC: Not the gran I knew.
BC: Oh she was. Mind you I suppose, there again, when you’re desperate for food you’ll do anything won’t you.\(^{55}\)

Here Beth (BC), prompted by the interviewer (TM), explains that she was sent to the shops without any tokens in the ration book and comments that this was because her mother, Jane’s grandmother, was a ‘conniver’. Jane (JC) is not so understanding of this fact and challenges her mother that the grandmother she knew was not deceitful or conniving. We can infer that Jane felt that to take extra than was offered was okay but to deliberately deceive was not how she felt her family should have behaved during the war years. It is at this point, when challenged, that Beth suggests that this was done out of desperation. She goes further to emphasise food shortages and how desperate they were after this in the interview and Jane agrees and accepts this explanation. However, this is different from the emphasis Beth had placed on the incident in her individual interview. In light of Jane’s reaction Beth perhaps realises that her story may show the family to have not been a part of equal hardship and pulling together that is emphasised in the British memory of rationing. The topic was also discussed during the interviews done with Sara and her father nineteen months later when Beth joined in the family discussion:

SC. I bet Gran got stuff off the black market didn’t she?
BC. She did, what she could get on the black market she got – she didn’t care.
TM. What do you think about the use of the black market? By your Gran?
SC. I think yeah it sounds like Gran she was a good time girl, she liked the good things in life
BC. It was desperation really lots of times
SC. How did you get to know though about who got what, or was it just like word of mouth?
BC. It was word of mouth.\(^{56}\)

Here Beth does not specifically bring up the point about going to the shops without the coupons in the ration books but agrees with Sara’s assumption that their family used the

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\(^{55}\) FD Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 678-684.
\(^{56}\) Ibid., 312-318.
black market. Sara (SC) is not concerned about this and comments that she knows her grandmother ‘liked the good things in life’ indicating that Sara did not feel the family were forced into the situation but did this for extra luxuries that rationing did not always provide for. However, like the interview with Jane, Beth feels the need to offer some explanation of why the family cheated the system to gain extra that they were not entitled to. Thus, the Clark family is a good example of how people are prepared to admit that they did not always strictly adhere to the rules of rationing but there is a hint of discomfort when attempting to justify those actions considering the popular memory of British equal sacrifice, discussed in chapter two, and camaraderie. It could be that people are more willing to share stories of minor encounters with the black market and gaining extra they are not entitled to because this also shows a certain amount of personal ingenuity to help themselves during the war that consisted of such relatively small amounts of food that they almost felt it did not really matter. However, here it was only after the first generation interviewee considered the position in more detail, or were challenged by family members that she became more defensive in describing these actions. In the case of the Clark family Beth being sent to the shops without the coupons and people taking pity on the small child in front of them is an example of a clever ploy that only succeeded because of the goodwill of people in the shops at the time. Yet when describing it to her daughters Beth became uncomfortable when challenged or when being explicitly linked to black market activity and felt the need to justify was it was necessary rather than being the light hearted memory it was in her original narrative.

Of course not all people mentioned doing this and some interviewees expressed displeasure at the knowledge of others getting more than everyone else. Although it should be mentioned these examples were only recorded on four occasions in four
separate interviews. Below Robert Davey, born in 1915 and aged 92, a retired Methodist minister, made the following observations about people taking more rations than they were entitled to in a group interview of first generation members:

RD: Oh, it was rife, it was rife. Pal of mine he joined the ambulance service, he was a CO, conscientious objector, and he joined the ambulance service and he was stationed at an ambulance station in the East End. And after two weeks of being down there a chap said to him ‘We haven’t had your ration list yet’, he said ‘What do you mean?’, ‘Well’, he said, ‘Sugar, tea, right, whatever you want, just jot it on the piece of paper and we’ll deliver it’. [gasp from one of the other group members] And this was going on right through the/ all over the country. It was the biggest racket out, and all these very patriotic people, glory in war, quite prepared to go left right and centre in getting supplies on the black market. Wicked.  

This comment was made after the topic was brought up by the interviewer as a prompt rather than naturally occurring from the conversation. Nevertheless, this is the most overt criticism, the other three examples in this section hint a little annoyance, such as Maureen Nicholls who contrasts those who could afford extra to her mother who had to get up early to queue for fish, but do not dwell on the subject or label those who got extra as ‘wicked’ like the example above. This could be a symptom of the overriding public memory that everyone was in it together and therefore even individual examples of where this is not the case are not necessarily the catalyst for anger or feelings of victimisation.

Attitudes to Authority Figures

Chamberlain’s involvement in the policy of appeasement has stark ramifications in that blame is attributed to him, and he is intrinsically linked to the outbreak of the Second World War. In ten different examples over nine interviews, all of which are from first generation narratives, Chamberlain is linked to the outbreak of war through his role in the Munich Agreement of September 1938. What is interesting is how this is

57 GD, FG, GB, TM, 9.5.08, lines 376-384.
described by the first generation witnesses. Grace Baines commented that ‘I remember us sitting in the front room around the radio and Mr Chamberlain came down the/ because we didn't have television but they described when he came down from the plane waving a paper saying ‘peace in our time’. And well basically when he got to 10 Downing Street the war was/ he’d walked into Poland Hitler had.’58 Here she remarks that the way she has remembered the occasion was that Hitler invaded Poland almost immediately after Chamberlain had returned from Munich whereas we know it was almost eleven months later with the Nazis first occupying the remainder of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Six of the ten references that link the Munich Agreement to the outbreak of war do so, in at least an implicit sense, that war occurred if not in a few hours, than in a matter of days, after its conclusion. The remaining four examples do not mention any type of timescale but do also explicitly link the Munich Agreement, and especially the separate accord between Germany and Britain, that Chamberlain proudly showed off at the airport on his return, as the reason for war. Audrey Bell also remarked:

AB. I can't remember the space between him coming back and the war breaking out, I don't think he could have been a very long.
TM. No, it wasn't I think it was October 1938 he came back and waived a bit of paper and then the following September was when war broke out, so it was within a year.
AB. Was it! Gosh, don't you memories sort of/ I would have said weeks rather than a year.59

The image of Chamberlain returning from Munich waving that piece of paper at the airport has become so intrinsically linked to the failed policy of appeasement and the outbreak of war that even some of those first generation witnesses who recall it have misremembered the timescale between its occurrence and the eventual outbreak of war almost a year later. Yet this does not occur in any of the subsequent generations. This

58 FG Grace Baines, GB, TM, 6.6.08, lines 13-16.
59 FG Audrey Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 443-449.
could be because it is not known or they do not feel it is relevant, or it could also be because some of the third generation members mentioned studying the pre-war period as a GCSE topic and their education was sufficient to not make that mistake. The link between appeasement and war indicates the negative aspects with which the first generation viewed the policy and blamed the government of the time for its inception. However, it should be remembered that even in February 1939 a Gallup poll showed that only 24 per cent believed appeasement would bring war nearer.\textsuperscript{60} Appeasement did have many supporters in Britain to maintain peace in Europe even up to March 1939. However, this is not how the British would want to remember themselves because it does not align with how they view their own role in World War II and so the government of Neville Chamberlain is left to shoulder the blame. None of the participants admit to supporting Chamberlain or his policy, thus he is left isolated. The focus on his unilateral agreement with Hitler depicts Chamberlain as not acting in the best interests of the British people. Conversely the people are implicitly presented as united against this policy through the way it brought war to Britain in the above extracts.

Conversely, Britain’s other wartime leader, Winston Churchill, is remembered fondly as embodying all that was best about the British peoples’ war spirit of the era.\textsuperscript{61} Nine examples from eight interviews expressed great admiration for Churchill; again this was heavily biased towards the first generation with all of these examples coming from the contemporary witnesses bar one which was from the third generation. First


\textsuperscript{61} This obviously is in contrast to the participants from Coventry who criticised his actions during the bombing of the city in 1940. Only two interviewees feature in both sections of analysis, Beth Clark (first generation) and Tim Clark (third generation). Beth features because she mentions that others had said Churchill was a great man though she doesn’t go that far herself. Tim does offer more enthusiastic assessment that Churchill helped Britain win the war. He has clearly reconciled the bombing of Coventry with the fact that he also admires Churchill’s war role.
generation member Frieda Reid commented that ‘I used to think he was a great man because he helped us win the war really.’ Here Frieda describes Churchill as a great man because ‘he helped us win the war’. Therefore, although she recognises his role as an inspirational leader she also frames this idea in a collective sense that Churchill’s role was still to help the people. As Connelly points out the popular view of Churchill is of the inspirational figure who led the British people during World War II, seeing them through their darkest days. However, it was not just for the role of leader that Churchill is remembered, it is also for representing the spirit that the British people themselves matched in their own actions. When Britain’s wartime leaders are reflecting the public memory of the era in their actions they are recalled in a positive light, however, when they were perceived to have acted in a way unrepresentative of the wishes of the people the opinion of the interviewees is rather more negative.

Linked to this idea of the people ultimately being agents of their own victory is the popular notion that the population had to muddle through at times because of inefficiency in command positions. There are thirty-five examples from eighteen interviews of people having to ‘muddle through’ because those in charge have made wrong decisions or have not provided the proper support. Twenty six of these examples are from first generation interviews, with seven from the second generation and only two examples from the third generation, therefore this is a stronger issue for the first generation. We should note again that the idea of ‘muddling through’ is one popular and commented on by scholars already before the analysis was conducted. It is worth bearing in mind the influence that this may have had on the reading of some of the extracts that follow. At times there was no definite plan or order of how things should be, therefore the implicit praise is on the ingenuity of the people to make it work out for

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62 Freida Reid, GB, TM, 20.2.09, lines 335-336.
63 Connelly, We Can Take It!, p.120.
the best. The narratives are concerned with how the people coped as the war progressed. This can be memories of uniform not fitting as Richard Cox explained about his father and brother’s experience in the Home Guard: ‘I always remember the suits they were issued with, never fitted, I think that’s probably one thing they’ve got wrong with the thing on television, Dad’s Army, is the clothes that they/ they fit fairly well, but I remember my brother and my father’s kit was terrible, they had to go back and back and back to try and get something that fitted.’64 This is a relatively minor incidence in regard to the total war effort but Richard makes a point of noting that the uniforms his family received were not at all like what was portrayed on television in the popular series Dad’s Army. However, that series in itself highlighted the confused muddles of a group of Home Guard soldiers. Summerfield notes the huge impact Dad’s Army has had on Britain in their view of the Home Guard and argues that a satirical representation such as this only worked because Britain was the victorious nation and the Home Guard never had to fight an invasion, thus the British public can enjoy their attempts to do their best for the war effort by muddling through and pulling together.65 This could be evidence of why there are a much smaller amount of examples in the second and third generation for this topic, because the issues are not highlighted by the first generation and therefore subsequent generations believe they are not of great importance. In the narratives expressed here about the British command not quite getting it right, they are told with a levity that can only be expressed because ultimately such mistakes did not lead to defeat.

A further twenty examples from ten interviews went a little further to hint at a lack of respect for those in authority as they were not ‘in it together’ like the ordinary

64 FD Cox, GB, TM, 30.1.09, lines 108-112.
people. For instance Shirley Wilkinson described how her grandfather could not go straight up to his son, her father, who had been a prisoner in Japan during the war because those in charge insisted on the correct protocol. She remarked that ‘I mean it must have been awful because you know it was, me granddad used to be on the Royal Yacht, and my dad used to come onto it and have to salute him and everything else and he hadn’t seen his son from thinking he was dead all this time and he couldn’t just go up and give him a hug or anything could he.’ Shirley describes how those in charge did not understand the emotion of the situation. This demonstrates on a deeper level how they were not in tune with the feelings of the public, the feelings of the people who had fought the war and defeated Nazism. First generation member Tom Lewis also noted that ‘We’d [got] no transport, it was one muddle after muddle after muddle. Of course they were completely out-generalled, the Japanese had already been doing this in Manchuria and elsewhere. The lines of communication were just tracks, there was no roads, no railways, if you got clobbered it took you some time to get you out of it.’ Tom describes how transport provision was inadequate but hints at other problems by suggesting that ‘it was one muddle after muddle after muddle’. He blames the generals for not being as good as the Japanese and suggested that if a soldier got injured (‘got clobbered’) then the time it took to be taken away to safety was inadequate. Of course instances like Tom’s and Shirley’s memories are not what we would expect to find as the metanarrative of the war, as has been mentioned, is one of the British people all pulling together to achieve victory. It is possible extracts like these were classed as such because of the analysis being done with this in mind. Yet there were complaints about those higher up who made mistakes and it seems that the idea of ‘the people’ does not

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66 Seven of these examples do come from one person, Tom Lewis from the first generation group interview conducted 6.6.07.
67 SG, Shirley Wilkinson, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 195-198.
68 GD, FG, GB, TM, 6.6.07, lines 418-422.
necessarily include the nameless people in command who did not always back up the efforts that the rest of the country was showing. In comparison this can have the effect of showing the British people in an even more positive light considering they achieved what they did seemingly without the complete support of those in charge.

A Family Memory Contradicting Unity

Finally in this chapter it is worth looking at the Pole/ Rye family and how they described the treatment of a relative who died in the Blitz. First generation member Mary Pole recalled her husband’s feelings about what happened to his own father who was killed in a bombing raid and commented ‘I know my husband, I mean he was seven, I mean when we met and was talking later, he was very, very bitter, he was very, very angry, because who ever found his body, they robbed him of everything. Money, watches, everything and they never did find out where his grave was because there was a mass grave in Coventry.69 This obviously does not align itself with the popular memory of people helping each other and that they were ‘in it together’ but is of significance to the Pole/ Rye family. Second generation member Ann Pole noted the importance of the story by commenting that it had been ‘rehearsed… in the family over the years’,70 thus suggesting it was a familiar family story that generations regarded as significant to relay to others. Ann mentioned that ‘The story goes, when they found his body, everything had been taken, his pay packet and everything. So the spirit of the Blitz wasn’t quite as positive as you might have been led to believe.’71 Ann specifically notes that the ‘spirit of the Blitz’ was not always as people are ‘led to believe’ through her family’s experience. It is also through this experience that her general view of what happened focuses more on some of the negative aspects:

69 FG Mary Pole, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 232-236.
70 SG Ann Pole, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 55-57.
71 Ibid., 73-75.
AP. It wasn’t as it was all presented and there was an awful lot of looting that went on.
TM. Yeah, yeah.
AP. Which is human nature, isn’t it, people will take advantage.

Crawford comments that ‘very little is said in any textbooks about black market activities or about looting during the Blitz, yet looting and violent crimes were widespread.’ Within a few months after Dunkirk the number of looting cases in London had risen from 539 to 1,662, this was not helped by the fact that wartime reports noted that up to 42 per cent of looters were previously law abiding citizens such as air raid wardens or auxiliary firemen. Furthermore, the police force declined from 57,012 in 1940 to 43,026 in 1943 and between 1940-1945 special constables declined from 25,220 to 12,951. Yet here Ann discusses looting being more prevalent because of the circumstances of her grandfather’s death. However, much like as we have mentioned before, the extenuating circumstances and lack of victimhood is evident by Ann’s comment that this is just ‘human nature’, and therefore it is the circumstances rather than the individual who committed the crime that is to be blamed. Much like how we discussed the reluctance to overtly criticise people during the evacuation process because everyone was meant to be wilfully helping each other, even Ann cannot condemn all those who looted during the Blitz. This is also reflected in the tone of the third generation member, Dominic, who comments that ‘the shock of the bomb blew a lorry over and it landed on him and that's how he died, he got crushed by the lorry. Apparently people looted him as well, you know they took his watch and his wallet off him, so they couldn't identify the body.’ Much like Ann’s comments this is very matter of fact, dealing with the details but once more not offering a great emotional

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72 Ibid., 143-146.
73 Crawford, ‘Constructing National Memory’, p.335.
74 Smith, Britain in the Second World War, p.17.
75 Dewey, War and Progress, p.319.
76 TG Dominic Rye, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 40-43.
response. We should concede that the lack of emotion in a one-off interview with a relative stranger is perhaps not all that uncommon and could be a sign of showing restraint or gaining a measure of control over what happened. However, emotion was present in some other interviews, as we saw with John Matthews in chapter one, and Ann’s specific words providing a justification for the looting is worth bearing in mind when we consider her attitude towards it. If we use Summerfield’s work on composure that was mentioned in the Introduction we could also say that Ann and Dominic, unsure of how to compose the looting story in regard to a collective memory that emphasised unity tell the story more in the context of the popular memory so that they feel they are being understood by the interviewer. In her research on London museums’ treatment of the Blitz Noakes argues that the version of the past they present can be one that sanitises or omits contested or problematic aspects of the past. This sanitisation can be seen here especially in the second and third generation’s testimonies. The popular memory states that Britain was united during the war and, even knowing what happened to their relative, it is only Mary who states that her husband was ‘angry’ at what occurred, the second and third generation’s narrative lack this raw emotional comment. Rather than this family memory being a source of contention, the Pole/ Rye family, especially the second and third generations where the emotional context of the memory has dissipated over time, seem more accepting of the circumstances of the theft. Thus we can say that although the story is present and vocalised the popular memory of Britain being united prevents too strong a reaction towards this knowledge.

Summary

We have seen in this chapter how the idea of community spirit and helping one another are still strong elements in the British memory of World War II. This even includes downplaying one’s own hardships and not exalting acts of heroism as out of the ordinary from the general population. However, in our discussions about aspects such as sheltering, evacuation and rationing we found narratives that could be viewed as sites of tension in the memories of the period that were not more explicitly commented upon perhaps because of the overriding popular memory co-operation. In the case of rationing there was the curious anomaly that the participants were often happy to discuss how they acquired extra rations they were not entitled too but that this sometimes had to be justified when questioned further by other family members. We moved on to look at how the interviewees remarked about those in power. These were the people whom the participants felt most comfortable in suggesting that they were not always in accord with the majority of the population in doing what was needed to win the war, Churchill being the exception to this. Finally, we discussed the narratives of the Pole/ Rye family and even though they had firsthand knowledge of a family member being looted during the Blitz which they were happy to discuss, the second and third generations showed little emotion towards the incident. The popular memory that Britain was a united nation places their private memory in conflict with the wider public recollections.
Chapter 4- Nostalgia

In the first three chapters we have examined how defiance, sacrifice and Britain’s collectivist attitude have influenced memory of the Second World War. The public memory of these themes is overwhelmingly positive and this contributes to producing a nostalgic and affirmative recollection of World War II from the interviews conducted. This idea is not entirely new in scholarly writings, for instance Crawford notes that in school history textbooks ‘many talk about the war as a good time, when families and communities worked together to help one another and defeat the Germans’.\(^78\) Furthermore, Summerfield has argued that part of the reason for the success of the TV series *Dad’s Army* was because viewers saw it as a celebration of simpler times, as a nostalgic look back to when Britain was united in a common cause rather than experiencing industrial unrest and the three-day week, as it was in the early 1970s.\(^79\) However, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the idea of a nostalgic and largely positive war memory that exists in England. This chapter will look at individuals own personal fond recollections but also begin to examine how some areas are deliberately sanitised within the narratives to omit potentially difficult memories. Richards argues that nostalgia about a mythic ‘Golden Age’ directs our responses towards the present and should not be seen simply as a fondness of the past. He suggests that people, rightly or wrongly, emphasise the negatives of modern society and contrast that with ‘an idealised past, [which] is also an image of an imagined future. It


sets a list of targets for our elected governors to attain’. Thus nostalgia is a powerful force to shape future desires that impact on our lives in the contemporary world - rather than an inactive positive view of a period in history that does not acknowledge any problems of the era. This is important because we will see how World War II is remembered as a type of ‘great adventure’ and how this has impacted interviewees’ responses to contemporary issues, including conflicts post-1945.

World War II as a Positive Experience

The Second World War being a happy time is a strong factor within the interviewees’ narratives. It was mentioned on thirty-four occasions in twenty-three interviews. The fact that thirteen of these examples came from the second and third generations shows this is an area that is commented upon by not just the contemporary witnesses and the general notion of happiness is transmitted through the tone of the generational stories. There is also a strong gender bias in these responses towards females; indeed twenty-seven of the overall thirty-four examples are from female respondents. This could be because much of the happier memories occur from recollections of the Home Front, experienced more by first generation females, and perhaps passed on with more success by female relatives to other females within the family as the older members discussed their own experiences of growing up with daughters and granddaughters in their formative years. First generation witness Rebecca Solomon, a retired teacher aged 81 and born 1927, comments about having a happy wartime experience when relaying a story about staying with a family in Falmouth. She mentions that ‘I went to school there and stayed there until I was 17, but really the


\[81\] Sixteen examples from the first generation, six from the second generation, and five from the third generation.
happiest time of my life, I mean homesick though I was but I liked it that other place.\textsuperscript{82}

This does not immediately seem too out of the ordinary from some of the other examples in this section. However, it is worth pointing out that Rebecca is a native Austrian Jew brought over on the \textit{Kindertransport} when she was a child and then settled in Britain. She was forced to leave her family behind in Vienna and many lost their lives in the Holocaust, including her mother. In this section she can be seen to be remembering her wartime youth as she experienced it and the reminiscence is akin to how it was lived and she is recalling those childhood feelings of happiness. We must bear this in mind and also note that at the time she was unaware of the fate of her family and so her happy memories are perfectly understandable. Yet it is interesting that even in hindsight it is happiness that is so strongly highlighted; that Rebecca chooses at this point, within the first five minutes of the interview, to emphasise her happiness. We can infer from her narrative that the strong collective memory of the war as a good time, where positive British character traits such as defiance, sacrifice and unity came to the fore, and her own family memory of loss is not necessarily her primary emotive memory.

The idea of the war being a happy time can lead to some of the later generations discussing how the era of the Second World War was actually a better period than the times we are currently living in. This theme was recorded in nine examples from eight interviews, with only one of these examples coming from the first generation. Here, third generation member Steve Wilkinson (SW) discusses the differences between the war and now:

\begin{quote}
SW: I mean that’s what’s changed in the world now isn’t it? If you grow up and you, like you say, in the, during the war years isn’t it, you respected the fact that you was alive I’m assuming.
JS: Yeah.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{82} FG Rebecca Solomon, GB, TM, 23.8.08, lines 66-68.
SW: You know, you see the [incomprehensible] searching for an invasion and you’re not going to worry about £10 in your pocket, or £5, buying a house are you, you’re going to worry about whether you’ll be breathing or not.  

In this extract Steve is talking to his grandmother, Jenny Smith (JS), and is directing his comments towards her to which she confirms and agrees with what he is suspecting. Steve is describing feelings that really should be associated with fear and uncertainty when he suggests that during the war years people ‘respected the fact that [they] were alive’. Yet this is not the tone of his narrative, by moving on to suggest that people did not have the worries that we would associate with modern life such as money or home ownership his musings appear more idyllic and longing for a simpler era where aspirations were less complicated. Whether Steve is correct is open to debate and not for us to discuss here, nevertheless he is not alone in these sentiments as second generation member Brett Miller (BM) comments:

BM. I think we've got very materialistic, and also/ well you've got to look at it now and times have moved on and the money is there for people to do what they want, where it wasn't before, so people make their own entertainment. And I would actually say in them days you had a better family life, we sit here, like Vince is nearly 15, we don't sit and talk, we don't, but I'm sure you all sat and did #or went and did/  
JM. We didn't have any/ we only had the radio.  
BM. So you know again with these games, with the TVs, with everything that kids have got now there's no family life really.

Like the previous extract it is the first generation member, Joan Miller (JM), who acts almost like a legitimising factor to what Brett (BM) is saying as he directs his comments towards her. When she does not disagree with him, Brett re-emphasises his point. In this extract Brett laments the fact that as a society we have become rather too materialistic and there is little time left for family. He comments how little time he gets to sit and talk with his own son (Vince) because, in part, to the technology that people own in modern life. Once more it is debateable how accurate his thoughts are on

83 FD Smith/ Wilkinson/ Hartley, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 184-190.  
84 FD Miller, GB, TM, 26.2.09, lines 393-400.
whether families in the 1940s really spent more time together, however, again we can point to the fact that he believes at least some aspects of life were better during the war and detect a longing amongst some of the second and third generation for a return to the ideals of the period; and the first generation in the above examples do not contradict these opinions.

Some of the memories that were mentioned were not just related to happier times during the war period but consisted of positive long term effects of war that have influenced peoples’ lives. This type of narrative was recorded in twenty-three examples from thirteen separate interviews, though it should be mentioned that eight of these examples were from second generation member, Erin Bell. Two of the families (Bell and Dyer/ Wright) discussed within their family how, because of travelling during the war, their grandparents met and were later married. These meetings it is stressed would never have happened had it not been for the war. First generation witness Audrey Bell commented that ‘I wouldn't have met my husband if it hadn't had been for the war, because he came from Norfolk and was sent down to Bournemouth to do this radar training’\(^85\) In a similar way second generation Wendy Wright states about her parents that ‘she [Wendy’s grandmother] used to meet the people from the trains and take them to their billets, or allocate them billets I think it was you know so that's how my mum met my father because there was nowhere for him to go and my grandma took him home.’\(^86\) It is perhaps not surprising that this type of memory would be prevalent within families as it is so personal to them. At the very beginning of her interview Erin Bell even admits that asking questions such as ‘how did you meet?’ was a way of beginning a conversation that would lead onto discussing the war.\(^87\) Yet this also shows that discussing the war in this context leads to a very positive lens through which the family

\(^{85}\) FG Audrey Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, lines 638-639.  
\(^{86}\) SG Wendy Wright, GB, TM, 5.6.08, lines 74-77.  
\(^{87}\) SG Erin Bell, GB, TM, 2.8.08, line 13.
can view some wartime experiences. In this context the war could even be viewed as a positive catalyst for the creation of the family unit within which it is being discussed.

These memories are not always major life changing narratives; they can be more mundane such as simply being taught to ‘jive’ in the case of Anne McCall who stated ‘I remember the Yanks very well. And we had/ that's where I learned to jive, yeah they taught me to jive, that's why I can jive, I still like to jive.’  

88 However, they can also affect a person’s whole outlook on life as John Matthews commented that ‘I think on balance evacuation did me good, if there'd be no evacuation I would have had a very narrow upbringing and I would have finished up in some second-rate clerical job in east London probably. As it was the war took me out of that environment, it made me independent, it opened my eyes to the world, it made me ambitious.’  

89 Thus the positive ways that some of the participants discussed the war affecting their lives were varied. However, it was also intriguing because it shows how, despite the overall premise that the war was not a good thing to happen (no-one ever stated this), some interviewees found the positives in such a situation. Of course it may seem natural to mention that people met their spouses during the war and families were formed but there is a sense that the war almost caused this to happen in fateful type way- Audrey Bell explicitly says above that ‘I wouldn't have met my husband if it hadn't had been for the war’. Furthermore, Anne McCall comments that the Americans taught her to jive, she immediately follows that with the explanations that this is why she can jive, and that she still likes jiving, somewhat intimating that she would never have discovered these facts about herself without the war.

A smaller, but still significant sample also mentioned negative long term effects of the Second World War, accounting for thirteen examples over six interviews,

88 GD, FG, GB, TM, 18.4.09, lines 1142-1144.
89 FG John Matthews, GB, TM, 17.11.08, lines 776-780.
although first generation witness John Matthews does account for seven of these examples.\textsuperscript{90} First generation member Frieda Reid commented about people who had seen distressing incidents during the war that ‘I think that's why a lot of elderly people, especially the men as well, because they had it worse I suppose in a way, with their nerves and that, that later on in life it made a difference to them I think.’\textsuperscript{91} That these traumatic events and other negative memories of the war were mentioned is significant. Yet, as we have seen, the examples and number of interviews mentioned within positive long-term effects of the war almost doubles those for the negative long-term effects of war, evidencing in this study the more nostalgic way the participants tended to view what had happened overall.

One particular aspect of the nostalgic view of the Second World War was the inclination for interviewees to describe instances of experiencing the war at first-hand, especially the Blitz and the air war, as exciting. Indeed, thirty-five examples over twenty-one interviews mentioned the idea of the war being an exciting period. Twenty-four of these examples were recorded from the first generation, though with six examples from the second generation and five from the third generation the idea was not exclusive to the contemporary witnesses. First generation witness Nancy Walker commented about seeing the war in the air over Britain that ‘I was about 12-13 we found it very exciting to watch. We didn't realise the seriousness, but we sort of/ watching the guns and the planes being shot down it was very exciting for young

\textsuperscript{90} You may have noticed that John Matthews features in the examples for positive long term memories of the Second World War; John’s testimony has extracts in each section because John talked at length about his experiences of evacuation and how this had positive and negative effects on aspects of his life. Some of John’s testimony is included in the positive long term memories section because it was my feeling (and I feel the extract I have used bears this out) that overall John concluded that, in hindsight, his evacuation experiences had an overall positive effect on his life. Nevertheless, the occasions where he also mentions dislocation from his parents, the interruption to his schooling, and his feelings of being an outsider on his return home were recorded in the negative long-term memories when mentioned.

\textsuperscript{91} FG Frieda Reid, GB, TM, 20.2.09, lines 178-181.
people, to young children.”\textsuperscript{92} Her daughter Lara also noted how her mother ‘told me lots of little things about how it was really. And how the war time for her was really quite a nice exciting time and not particularly scary, frightening experience. I suppose because she was young as well she was seeing it/ I don’t suppose at her age she realised the implications and the seriousness.\textsuperscript{93} Both of these extracts are at near the beginning of Nancy and Lara’s interviews and the idea of the war as ‘exciting’ is overtly mentioned in both, indicating a theme that is strong in the family memory. Of all the ‘little things’ about the war Lara has heard from her mother it is the ‘exciting’ element she appears to focus upon as the main context for how her mother felt during the war. Both Nancy and Lara acknowledge the seriousness of the situation with hindsight, but because of Nancy’s youth watching what was happening seemed exciting at the time. Whilst not wishing to map the responses exactly against the scholarly work already completed, they speak sufficiently for themselves, we should note that Connelly points out that the Blitz made heroes out of ordinary people; it cast them onto the centre-stage of history.\textsuperscript{94}

The above examples do not convey completely the heroic element of ordinary people, which was covered in the previous chapter. However, by being at the centre-stage of history people remember the event as exciting, as something that you do not have to describe to people from second hand experience but can say proudly ‘I was there’. As we discovered in chapter one with John Matthews’s traumatic recollections of being in a bombing raid it is of course much easier to be able to do this if one was not directly affected by the horrors of the Second World War.

Linked to the idea of seeing war as exciting are other themes that were recorded such as people placing themselves in danger (recorded in six examples in six

\textsuperscript{92} FG Nancy Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 35-37.
\textsuperscript{93} SG Lara Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 15-19.
\textsuperscript{94} M. Connelly, \textit{We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War}, (Harlow, 2004), p.152.
interviews) and wanting to be a part of the Blitz and emphasising their role in it (recorded in four examples from three interviews). In the below example first generation witness Richard Cox describes what he did during an air raid:

On the golf course there was an ack-ack battery and they took over a couple of holes on the golf course and my back garden wall was the wall of the golf course, so when all the aeroplane started coming over and the ack-ack started firing at them I went up the garden, and as I say I was about 15 then, and jumped over the wall at the end of our garden, I was then on the golf course, and jumped down into a drainage ditch, there was a drainage ditch about 2 feet deep, and I thought to myself if there’s any incendiaries or anything like that dropping, or anything with shrapnel it would go across the top.95

Richard describes how he deliberately put himself in greater danger by getting closer to the anti-air gun and putting himself in greater risk of getting injured rather than go somewhere to shelter from the raid. Summerfield, in her study of wartime working women, has argued that the women ‘drew satisfaction from the wartime dangers to which they were exposed. These perils represented evidence of the job’s value and the women’s proximity to the battlefront.’ I would argue this could be extended to any danger experienced on the Home Front; it made people feel they were a part of the war. Thus such instances are remembered fondly and emphasised to demonstrate involvement. In the example above the way Richard describes using a ditch to prevent himself from being hit from a bomb explosion even sounds like military tactics that would be used at the front. The narrative could just as easily be a child playing war as one who was actually experiencing it.

Noakes has commented on the shift of the Blitz in public perceptions and contends that it ‘is being moved from its place during the war as an important but by no means universal experience of the British nation at war to the centre of public representations of the war.’96 It is certainly true that every one of the first generation

95 FG Richard Cox, GB, TM, 30.1.09, lines 22-29.
interviewees had at least something to say about their own experience of the bombing campaign. However, this is not necessarily a recent phenomenon, a Mass Observation report from September 1940 about air raids comments that after an area has been raided ‘People go to see the damage, compare experiences, [and] exaggerate personal contact with bombs (if this is not great).’\(^\text{97}\) As an interesting aside, in his book *Band of Brothers* Stephen Ambrose writes about the attitude of the US soldiers he interviewed to their witnessing of heavy shelling from the Germans at Hagenau in February 1945. Ambrose writes that although they were in danger the men in this location were also fascinated by the shelling as they were ‘spectators of war’ and quotes Glenn Gray from his book *The Warriors: Reflections of Men in Battle* that ‘War as a spectacle, as something to see, ought never to be underestimated’ and further notes himself that ‘the human eye is lustful; it craves the novel, the unusual, the spectacular.’\(^\text{98}\) I would like to extend this idea not just to men in battle but to ordinary people who witnessed extraordinary events during the war such as the Blitz, that it is not only terrifying but captivating also and it is not unusual for witnesses to remember it in such a way.

When the participants discussed rationing the belief emerged, especially from the first generation, that it was not only a positive thing for the country but also that people were actually healthier under rationing. This was recorded in fifteen examples over ten interviews, though twelve of these examples did come from the first generation females. During a first generation group discussion Kerry Webb (KW) and Steph Doyle (SD) agreed that:

KW: We were healthier/
SD: Yes, I’m sure we were.
KW: We were a healthy nation during the war. That’s the ridiculous thing.\(^\text{99}\)

\(^\text{99}\) GD, FG, GB, TM, 9.5.08, lines 345-347.
When they mention that they were healthier the participants in all the interviews are not just comparing pre-war with wartime conditions, they are also comparing the wartime health with present day. In the only third generation member to comment on this Tim Clark stated that ‘I’m aware that it happened, now that you do mention it, not particularly gran that said it to me, more granddad that said it to me. Rationing books were/ he said that they were very fair, he said that people ate a lot better than they probably do now, they probably ate a lot more healthily than they do now because these ration books were so well thought out and, yeah, great idea for the war.’

Although he was the only third generation member to mention this topic Tim does repeat what was argued by many of the first generation including his grandfather that people ate better during the war than they do now. We have mentioned how family events where food was involved was an opportunity for discussion about what the first generation did not have during the war that was recalled by subsequent generations. However, due to the infrequency of rations being healthy recalled in subsequent generations we must conclude that this is not talked about in the family setting or is not always taken on board by the later generations. It is possible that in the probing style of an interview with prompts the first generation mentioned this frequently but in the course of family conversations this is not a topic that would necessarily be discussed. During the war the BBC used to broadcast programmes on rationing and cooking, and in 1941 extended their health programmes with Wednesday’s *Kitchen Front*, it was estimated that 55 per cent of housewives listened to this programme with its audience disproportionally tipped towards the working class. This helped to link the premise of good cooking and rationing in the nation’s mind. Furthermore, rationing was linked to everyone getting a fair share of food and it prompted the government to introduce further

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100 TG Tim Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 295-299.
measures aimed at improving the nation’s health. The Ministry of Health provided a ration of free orange juice to infants, as well as a national milk scheme providing a half price pint of milk for expectant mothers and children under five which had a 95 per cent take up by 1945.\textsuperscript{102} Furthermore, by the end of the war around one third of schoolchildren were receiving free school meals.\textsuperscript{103} Smith has written that in lower income families the war diet was superior to that before 1939 because they were eating far more vegetables, less fatty meat and the better milling involved in making the national wholemeal loaf improved the vitamin content. However, he notes it was not all positive, per capita food consumption fell by 18 percent and energy intake was less than 2,300 by 1942, much less than the recommended daily amount, especially for manual workers.\textsuperscript{104} However, it would appear that this idea and memory of rationing as a healthy alternative has remained in the public consciousness, especially of the contemporary witnesses, and the nostalgic reminiscences of rationing have, in some cases, overaken the thought of rationing as a time of shortages and long queues.

Sanitisation of Combat

The memory of combat knowledge from the participants is an area where it appears what was remembered was the more positive, or at least neutral, elements of combat. First generation witness Bruce Vaughn commented about his experience of Operation Overlord that ‘we went over and we landed on Gold Beach and we had a huge sand dune to climb up and I'd had enough and I just dropped, and believe it or not there were some German prisoners waiting to go back in our landing craft that we'd come over in, one of them brought me a cup of tea over, on the beach.’\textsuperscript{105} Admittedly,

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{105} FG Bruce Vaughn, GB, TM, 3.12.08, lines 38-41.
Bruce was not part of the initial invasion of the French coast and arrived after D-Day, nevertheless the above narrative is used as one example to demonstrate the memories that were typical of Bruce’s reminiscences of what he saw of combat in Europe from 1944-45. When discussing his experiences his focus was not on the serious but often on the trivial aspects of what he experienced such as above where, in a section remembering his combat experiences, he choose to focus on being brought a hot beverage from a German POW. We must also bear in mind once more the effect of the unnatural interview setting as opposed to how people would usually remember. In this sense a participant my not want to show their emotions to an interviewer and attempt to keep a measure of control over both their emotions and what memories they choose to share.

Combat knowledge being ‘sanitised’ accounts for seventeen examples from eleven interviews with thirteen of these examples coming from the first generation such as Bruce’s above (and nine of these thirteen examples from first generation males). However, the example below from second generation witness John McCarthy is revealing about even what was talked about within the family:

You know the Americans supplied tanks as part of lend-lease or whatever it was and so obviously they sent over you know Shermans, and his unit was equipped with Sherman tanks. Which I mean now I've learnt, recently, from watching various programs that they were particularly unsafe. Because the fuel tank was at the back and if hit the whole lot went up. But my dad never told me that [laughter]. That was something that was never mentioned, whether they were aware of that or not I don't know.106

John notes that the only way he learnt about the dangers his father faced in the Sherman tanks was from television programmes and this was something his father never mentioned to him. The way John is able to laugh at the fact his father never told him this is only because his father did return safely and John has no further horrific stories.

106 SG John McCarthy, GB, TM, 18.6.08, lines 104-110.
about his father’s personal experiences in the Sherman tanks. John even questions whether his father knew about the dangers of the tank he was in, we do not know whether he did or not but we can infer from John comments that no danger was discussed within the family. This does demonstrate how the omission of certain areas of battle knowledge can mean that the second and third generations do not have much to discuss about the first generation’s actual combat experiences and find knowledge from other areas such as the media.

One area where they do have something to say however, is discussing more flippant information and it is this that tends to also be recalled by relatives of those who experienced combat. The knowledge of more flippant information accounts for eighteen examples over fourteen interviews with eight of these examples in the first generation, eight in the second generation, but only two from the third generation. If we remain looking at the Nicholls/ McCarthy family here because they are a good case study for this topic and survey first generation Maureen Nicholls comment about her husband that ‘they'd all got out of the tank and goodness knows what, they were pinned down somewhere and you know he said “let’s have a cup of tea”, because they had to go back to the tank to get the stuff out to make a cup of tea, but that was typical of Bernard you know.’107 Here, Maureen is discussing quite a serious situation where her husband has had to bail out of the tank because it has been hit and they were ‘pinned down’ by enemy fire, yet the family knowledge of the situation is that her husband, Bernard, returned to the tank to make everyone a cup of tea. When asked about this story second generation John McCarthy commented that ‘I can see the logic of that, I mean people in situations like that are going to [5sec] things are going to take on an importance that probably aren’t rational in regards to the situation, if you're sat there and not able to do

107 FG Maureen Nicholls, GB, TM, 18.6.08, lines 568-571.
anything “oh god I'll make everybody a cup of tea” you know, and the fact that you've got to go and possibly get killed to do it is not bravery or stupidity it's just I suspect an irrational act under stress. This story is well known within the family because a picture of the tank crew and the battle discussed here were used for a display at the Imperial War Museum that was visited by the family when John, 52 at the time of the interview, was a child. John does recognise the seriousness of the situation but without any other knowledge of what happened he finds reasons for his father’s actions. He comments that the whole situation was an ‘irrational act under stress’ yet this is not something that has been told to him but his own interpretation of why his father did this. He may of course be correct but we do not know because it appears that the memory of the situation that was focussed upon within the family was the actual making of the cup of tea. Excluded from either Maureen or John’s knowledge are the events of the skirmish, the outcome of the battle, or anything about the wellbeing of Bernard’s tank crew or any of the other tanks. The only recollection is that of making tea which incorporates the idea of defiance we mentioned in chapter one, to carry on as normal in extreme circumstances. Perhaps this was the only way Bernard could explain what had happened in a frame that he felt his family would understand because it allowed him to assimilate his experience with what was emphasised in the public memory. In another way there is an element here of the later generations also reluctant to pick up on stories that their family suffered and are more comfortable repeating the narratives that emphasise the flippant, and thus more easily discussed memories.

As well as the flippant information there is an acknowledgement from a section of the interviewees that the combat experience of their relatives was scarcely mentioned. This topic occurs in twenty-three examples over sixteen interviews and is

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108 SG John McCarthy, GB TM, 18.6.08, lines 376-380.
most prevalent in the first and second generations (nine and eleven examples respectively) but only three examples from the third generation. Thus it is the second generation who comment most about the fact that perhaps some of the worst elements of combat are being held back. However, subsequently the third generation perhaps do not even know that information is being held back as they are a further generation removed. To return to the Nicholls/ McCarthy family, first generation member Maureen noted that her husband ‘never ever talked about it very much when he come home.’

She also elaborated further that:

I thought that/ was never any talk about counselling them about all that they'd seen, and they had to come home and cope with all that. You know it didn't dawn on me, ‘oh well Bernard’s coming home’ and that was it like, life just goes on. But nowadays I mean it's quite different, they've got to be counselled for all sorts of things nowadays. But you know there was no talk of counselling people then, it makes you wonder. Especially if people are/ well as I said Bernard’s involved in quite a bit of action but some people were involved in a lot more than he was but there was never any question of you know, you should do this and do that for them. But they just came home and had to get on with living.

As her husband would not open up about his experiences Maureen mentions that with hindsight she feels he would have benefitted from counselling. This would indicate that Maureen felt his inability to describe what he had been through was quite serious. Maureen also hints that she feels this was not just for the benefit of her own husband as she mentions the fact that ‘there was no talk of counselling people then’. This would point to what Maureen felt was a wider issue than just for her own husband.

Furthermore, in one of the second generation group interviews, conducted at an interviewee’s home, Des King (DK) and Ivy Walsh (IW), siblings aged 59 and 52 respectively, discussed their father’s attitude to talking about his wartime experiences:

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109 FG Maureen Nicholls, 18.6.08, line 535.
110 Ibid., 551-559. Interestingly, as well as mentioning how her husband saw action that she felt he probably needed counselling for she also takes time to point out that ‘some people were involved in a lot more than he was’. This links directly to our discussion in chapter 3 about people downplaying their, or their families, own role for that of the collective.
DK: Our dad you had to get him very drunk, his whole life he never spoke about it very much at all, got him/ no I didn’t get him, he’d had quite a few one night and he spoke, not a lot, but he did speak about it and he told us things that he’d been through and you thought ‘Christ’, you know.
IW: Yeah that happened to us wasn’t it, we were out for a meal, was we all together for that meal? And he started saying about he was injured and he led on the field/
DK: Yeah, for 24 hours wasn’t it/
IW: And he’d been shot in the leg, and they have little ampoules of morphine, in their back-pack or whatever. He’d gone on this recce, got shot in the leg and it went sort of in his knee and came out the top of his thigh and he had to lay on a field for I think 8 hours injecting himself with morphine before anyone could go and get him. And he never said anything did he? And he was so angry, I don’t know whether this is relevant, but he was sent home and after the war had ended they sent him a little postcard, the War Office, sent him a little postcard saying ‘Please tell us what medals you think you’re entitled too’, and he was so angry he threw it in the fire and never claimed his medals.111

This quote shows the reluctance to talk about experiences that were harrowing in combat and Des and Ivy explain how their father had to get drunk to be able to say anything to them. When Ivy is discussing her father being angry and disillusioned with the War Office this is not the image of a nostalgic war I have been describing and contradicts idea of willing sacrifice as mentioned in earlier chapters. However, this example is an exception and many later generations do not comment about negative combat experiences preferring, as we have seen, to remark only about flippant information or not mention it at all. This seems to be because of a reluctance on behalf of the first generation to talk about them. If we consider some of the scholarly work in the area such as Connelly it is possible that these private memories do not fit into the public memory of a just and noble war coupled with the idea of the British Tommy being able to cope with whatever was thrown at him whilst remaining upbeat and defiant. Thus combat knowledge, in the majority of cases, becomes nostalgic, for instance incorporating humorous recollections such as making hot beverages during a battle, rather than raw and real.

111 GD, SG, GB, TM, 20.7.07, lines 506-521.
World War II Computer Games

During the family discussions the interviewer brought up the subject of computer games about World War II and asked if anyone had ever played any of them and what their opinion was of them. In all the interviews these style of games were not condemned by the second and third generations and in eight examples from four family interviews the later generations promoted them as harmless and just a game. Second generation John McCarthy commented about the games that ‘I don't know whether you're necessarily becoming involved in the story, you imagine yourself as being a Second World War soldier or whether you're just playing a computer game and it's the challenge, it's the theme, and you know as I say it could be a Dungeons and Dragons game, it's the same basic challenge of what you're doing, just different tools, different methods, different storyline.’\(^\text{112}\) As we can see John proposes that there is no difference between a historical game such as one based in World War II compared to any other games such as one based on a fantasy genre.

However, this is not always the opinion of the first generation who can remember the war and in eleven examples over nine interviews (60 per cent of all the family interviews conducted) there was some evidence of tension between the generations over this issue. In the extract below first generation witnesses Joan and Keith Miller (JM and KM respectively) perceive World War II games differently from their grandson Vince Miller (VM), who was 14 years old at the time of the interview and confessed to playing these types of games regularly:

KM. I don't think they should make games out of what happened during the war.
TM. What do you think Vince, do you think/
VM. It's just another game really to me.
TM. So you don't really think about the meaning behind?

\(^{\text{112}}\) SG John McCarthy, GB, TM, 18.6.08, lines 82-86.
VM. No.
JM. It's when you know what it was and another generation on know of it but not what it was really.
TM. So you think it's a generational thing?
JM. Yeah.\footnote{FD Miller, GB, TM, 26.2.09, lines 20-28.}

Here Keith, a retired mechanic, believes that they should not make games about the war but Vince, still at school at the time of the interview, counters that it is not the war specifically that makes him play the game and that it is just like other games in the same genre and the meaning behind World War II games is not a consideration. Joan specifically comments that her generation knows what it was like whereas later generations only know of the events. Therefore she seems to imply that only by living through the events and witnessing what happened can someone be suitably influenced not to want to re-enact the occasion in a computer game. This idea can be further explored when we look at the Clark family discussion about the same topic. Earlier in the interview first generation witness Beth Clark (BC) had noted reservations about the idea of World War II being used for a computer game but second generation witness Jane Clark (JC) and third generation witness Tim Clark (TC) had intimated that they were comfortable with the idea. Here the interviewer (TM) asks if a similar game could work for the Falklands War:

TM: Do you think a similar game could work for The Falklands?
TC: Yes/
JC: No.
TC: Yes, no, maybe. Because it’s more of an open space and also it’s very fresh in people’s mind.
JC: That’s why I don’t think it would work I think. I don’t think it would/
BC: Because a lot of people are still alive.
JC: Because people are still alive and would be offended, they’re my age.
BC: Yeah.
TC: Perhaps in thirty years maybe.
JC: Maybe, but yeah when you put it like that actually, if you fought in the Second World War then that would be offensive.\footnote{FD Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 1049-1060.}
We see that Tim, born in 1987 and therefore with no contemporary memories of the Falklands Conflict, immediately says that this idea could work but after his mother suggests that it could not he becomes more unsure of himself and recognises that it is an instance in many peoples’ living memories. It is because Jane can remember it directly that she does not like the idea of creating a computer game out of the event. After Beth points out that she does not like the idea because a lot of people are still alive Jane reconsiders her position on the World War II games and concedes that they could even be ‘offensive’. This link to what people find offensive compared to what they have personal experience of was further highlighted in August 2010 when the Defence Secretary Liam Fox backed a ban on a controversial video game that is set in Afghanistan during the current Afghan conflict.\textsuperscript{115} The game in question, \textit{Medal of Honor}, has had previous incarnations as a game set during World War II in both the European and Far Eastern theatres of war and has not in the past courted controversy or comment from the British government. However, the idea of fighting the current Afghan conflict, as both US and Taliban forces, has drawn the criticism of Liam Fox and a comment that by doing this the game is in itself ‘un-British’.\textsuperscript{116} In their defence the makers of the game, Electronic Arts, retort that ‘Many popular video games allow players to assume the identity of enemies, including Nazis’.\textsuperscript{117} This is true, however, the fact that this is an ongoing conflict, still present not only in peoples’ memories but as fresh news stories of death and suffering updated on a daily basis, seems to have caused particular upset to this particular game.\textsuperscript{118} Yet for those who were not contemporary

\textsuperscript{115} BBC News, 23.8.10 at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-11056581
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
witnesses to some of the more horrific affects of World War II they are more willing to accept the use of this platform for similar games.

However, it is better to view computer games based during World War II in relation to a tradition within Britain to view the conflict as an adventure. Harper has pointed out that war films made after 1945 could adopt the ‘adventure’ guise since a happy ending was assured, this genre is traditionally British and masculine in outlook and a proliferation of war films after 1950 upheld this.\textsuperscript{119} Perhaps the forerunners of adventure style computer games about World War II were the comic books, popular up to the mid-1980s. Paris argues that children were influenced by comics such as\textit{Battle} or\textit{Victor} that portrayed World War II as a glorious adventure and comments that the war comic boom reached a peak between 1965-1980 when the young people of the world are most thought of as adhering to peace and anti-nuclear, anti-Vietnam War sentiments; however, Paris argues this could happen precisely because of the sanitised, romanticised memory of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{120} He also contends that it is a particularly British stance, of all the European combatants, to still promote a culture of war and violence stating that ‘never have so many people been so addicted to the pleasure culture of war in some form or another… since the end of the Second World War, parents and public watchdogs have, on several occasions, protested at the level of violence portrayed in American horror comics or in crime and horror stories on film and video, yet such protests have never been aimed at the pleasure culture of war.’\textsuperscript{121} Dawson elaborates on this point by analysing a specific example from\textit{The Victor Book for Boys 1967} about Sgt Miller, a British soldier who leads an attack on a heavily defended Italian base in the North African desert in 1940. Dawson rightly surmises that

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p.223.
\end{flushright}
his enjoyment of the story depends on him ‘making a positive identification with Sgt Miller… [he] could then be taken into the internal world as a positive image, with whom [he] could identify in imagining [him]self.’

Therefore, the computer game has become the updated version of the comic- World War II is now heroically replayed by fictional interactive digital game play rather than simply in print. Both include one man or small groups of men who, outnumbered, heroically achieve objectives vital to the war effort. In computer games the imagining of being the hero as Dawson describes is not needed, the adventurous youth can actually be a character from World War II and complete various, often vital, missions to aid the war effort.

The market in exploring the ‘pleasure culture of war’ as Paris phrases it above has been aimed at males since 1945. Not that there are no women who enjoy this but as in the previous example about the fictional Sgt Miller above, this story appeared in The Victor Book for Boys 1967 demonstrating exactly who their target audience was. One area where a clear gender divide emerges on this topic is when the participants in the group interviews are discussing picture four. In twelve examples from eight (out of nine) group interviews the discussion surrounding picture four concerned the males in the group wanting to identify the type of planes that were pictured. In the below extract from a second generation group conducted in a domestic home setting Des King (DK), born 1947, has already explained that he believes the planes are Stukas (he was correct) and the interviewer (TM) is exploring this further with Chris Green (CG) born 1955, Ivy Walsh (IW) born 1954, Steve Walsh (SW) born 1953 and Becky King (BK) born 1954 also contributing:

TM: It’s probably just for the record, but how do you know that they are Stukas, it’s probably just from the telly again.
CG: It’s the shape isn’t it.

DK: The shape yeah, I mean I’ve not studied the thing but I do like reading about it/  
IW: Well we all thought they were Spitfires/  
SW: We only had Spitfires when we were little.  
IW: All the girls thought they were Spitfires.  
SW: They’re not British.  
BK: I mean the books Des has on those sort of things.  
TM: Do you see a definite difference there then between what boys know about the war, a gender difference between what boys would know about the war?  
DK: Oh yeah, yeah, I love the hardware.  
IW: Yeah but I think, I think you’re right, I think there’s a definite boy-girl divide about the hardware, because a tank for me is a tank and a plane is a plane.123

As you can see from the years these group members were born they would all have grown up during this period from 1965-80 where Paris concludes the comic book boom reached its zenith. The men in the group here all try to add their own knowledge to the assertion by Des that they are Stuka bombers. Chris interrupts before Des gets a chance to answer the question directed towards him by the interviewer by suggesting that the type of plane was identifiable by its shape. Furthermore, despite Steve commenting that he only knew of Spitfires as a child he then comments confidently that he also is sure the planes are not British. Des himself admits that he is aware of the ‘hardware’ of war because he likes reading about the equipment and his wife Becky even comments on the amount of books he has. For their part the females in the group defer to the men’s knowledge to determine what planes are present in the picture. Ivy even points out how all the girls were wrong because they thought the planes were Spitfires. At the end of the extract the participants even seem aware of the differences as Des and Ivy agree about the differing levels of knowledge they would expect about tanks and planes between the genders. This is further repeated in a third generation group interview where female members Lou Stevens (LS) and Elizabeth Smith (ES) are discussing picture four and Adam Scott (AS) joins in to help them:

123 GD, SG, GB, TM, 20.7.07, lines 473-486.
LS: Are they German planes?
ES: Male people?
TM: I won’t tell you what they are.
LS: Okay, so they could be like invading another country or/?
AS: They look German.
ES: Why do they look German?
AS: Well, they’re not Spitfires and# they’re not Mustangs
ES: See, male.124

Even though all the interviewees are students and were born from 1987-88 there is still the deferral to the men to identify the hardware of war. When Lou asks about the planes Elizabeth immediately asks the males of the group for assistance recognising that they would be the most likely to know what aircraft was pictured. When Adam does offer some advice on identifying the planes by being able to correctly state that they are not Allied planes Elizabeth comments ‘See, male’ as a vindication of her assertion that the men in the group would be able to help. All of the groups are focussed on naming the planes in their interviews. As soon as a male member of the group successfully, or at least confidently, asserts the answer the focus on picture four is often lost and there is little more to say about it. The aim of picture four for the groups seemed to be wanting to identify the planes, after this was achieved, or perceived to be achieved, there was very little focus upon it thereafter. This way of looking at picture four demonstrates the focus upon the efforts to see World War II through the lens of an adventure story- one that focuses on weapons, tactics and military hardware, and omits the more emotional narratives that also sanitises some of the horrors of the conflict.

World War II in Relation to Later Conflicts

In eleven examples from ten interviews there were instances where the conversation would lead to the interviewees discussing later conflicts involving Britain in relation to the Second World War. That World War II is seen as a righteous war was

124 GD, TG, GB, TM, 19.3.07, lines 77-84.
not questioned by the interviewees, in none of the interviews did anyone suggest that Britain should have stayed out of the conflict. However, the issue of the Falklands conflict and later wars get a mixed response with some seeing links to the Second World War but others questioning why Britain should have even have gone to war there. It is Shaw’s contention that we can hypothesise that traditions, myths, memory and propaganda to do with past wars are extremely important in our relationship with current conflicts and thus the British share of victory in 1945 is supremely important in setting the tone for the experience of militarism in British culture. Connelly has shown how wars since 1945 have used reference to World War II to justify their enactment. In 1999 The Sun argued we should care about Kosovo for the same reasons we cared about Poland in 1939; in the first Gulf War British soldiers were compared to the Desert Rats; and in The Falklands the familiar World War II story of a bad start which turned into ultimate victory was played out. Second generation witness Jane Clark, interviewed when the British Army were in Iraq, commented that ‘Well, World War II and the Falklands War were wars in a way where, well let’s go for World War II first, wars where we’re actually trying to fight for democracy and for the people who were being invaded. And in the Falklands War as well, so it felt like we were the good guys. In the war in Iraq it feels like we’re the bad guys, that’s all I’ll say about that really, it feels like we’ve created a huge problem and it feels like we’ve done a lot of damage there.’ The way Jane makes a distinction between the British as ‘good guys’ in World War II and the Falklands conflict compared to her view of them as ‘bad guys’ in Iraq because she cannot see Britain being there for any righteous reasons such as ‘to fight for democracy’ that she explicitly mentions in relation to the Second World War.

126 Connelly, We Can Take It!, pp.270-272.
127 SG Jane Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 488-493.
and to defend itself as she mentions in relation to the Falklands. It should be noted that
the issue of later conflicts should be viewed through the lens of the reading that had
already been conducted before the interviewing process had begun. Questions about
later conflicts were often initiated to survey how participants viewed later conflicts in
relation to the work already carried out by Connelly and others. This should be borne in
mind though the interviewees did display some similar lines of argument to those
already proposed. Smith argues that at the outset of the Falklands conflict the links to
1940- that Britain was again alone and at war with a dictator- were played upon; he
notes that at the time Douglas Jay even suggested that the Foreign Office had been
‘saturated with the spirit of appeasement’ in not foreseeing the crisis.128 Smith is not
alone here, other scholars have highlighted how the media in 1982 fostered a sense that
British appeasement had led to war and how the Argentinean government was
characterised as a fascist dictatorship.129 In other, more quirky, links to World War II
Sir Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris was asked to give his opinion on strategic bombing and
Dame Vera Lynn recorded a new song for the troops.130 Three further sources,
including Jane Clark’s son Tim Clark, offer similar arguments about the Falklands
being at least in some way akin to the situation at the start of World War II. This
general attitude to World War II framing reasons why Britain should or should not
become involved in other world conflicts highlights the importance this ‘good war’ still
plays in contemporary British political thought.

129 See particularly R. Harris, Gotcha! The Media, The Government and the Falklands Crisis, (London,
Summary

We have seen here how the collective memory of World War II in England, largely emphasised the positive elements of England’s war experience, contributing to a nostalgic way of recalling the war. This can lead to the first generation highlighting the happier times of the war and some of the benefits of wartime conditions such as being healthier under rationing. This is transmitted to the later generations who demonstrate that what they know from their relatives is mostly the more positive aspects of their wartime experiences. However, in the case of combat knowledge this can lead to a sanitised way of remembering the conflict and there were hints that combat veterans perhaps struggled to vocalise and contextualise their war experiences in a way they felt accessible for family members who had not been through what they had. Finally, we surveyed the legacy of the Second World War as it influences computer games produced for entertainment and the response of people to later conflicts. It clearly is still pertinent, especially to the first generation, and this provoked some disagreement within families about how it should be portrayed in the entertainment industry.
PART 3

Chapter 5- The Holocaust

The Holocaust is not a topic that has been at the forefront of British consciousness when remembering the events of the Second World War. Donnelly notes that ‘for some forty years after 1945 the Holocaust remained a marginal feature of British historical accounts (scholarly and popular) of the national wartime experience’\(^1\) and when ITV screened the Genocide episode of the World at War series in 1973 ‘some viewers remarked that they were previously unaware of the genocidal ambitions of the Germans’ war against the Jews’.\(^2\) For the majority of the participants the Holocaust was something they would only remember hearing about rather than having firsthand knowledge of it, or of someone who experienced it. In the interviews conducted the first generation were asked about their memory of hearing about the Holocaust and the subsequent generations were more concerned with discussing knowledge they had of the Holocaust rather than actual family memories.\(^3\) However, this discussing of received knowledge, or what they believed about the Holocaust, generated some interesting topics that can be called ‘collective memories’ because they are concerned with how a group collectively perceives an event even if they were not actually involved in it.

The Holocaust has in recent years become much more visible in British commemorative events, the media and education. In 2001 the government began the annual Holocaust Memorial Day, held every January, and since 1991 the Holocaust has

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1 M. Donnelly, 'The Holocaust and post-war historical master-narratives of Britain’s “good war”', Unpublished, p.15.
2 Ibid., p.2.
3 This was obviously not the case with the two Jewish families interviewed where the first generation member came to Britain on the Kindertransport but these families are focussed upon at the end of this chapter in a case-study type fashion.
been a part of the school curriculum. However, Salmons points out that there is no guideline on how much classroom time must be devoted to the subject and therefore it is clear that young people’s knowledge and understanding may vary tremendously between classrooms, depending on the interest and objectives of individual teachers.\(^4\)

As Davis also points out when the Holocaust is taught within a Religious Education environment the syllabus tends to focus on what lessons can be learnt rather than what actually happened.\(^5\) Therefore, what schoolchildren end up learning and knowing about the Holocaust can vary considerably from school to school depending on how and what they are taught. This chapter will look at how there is limited knowledge of the Holocaust within Britain and the effect this has for an understanding of the Holocaust. This will include looking at the responses for pictures one, two and five in the group interviews. We will also look at responses that discussed perpetrator motivation, \textit{Schindler’s List}, and anti-Semitism in England from both Jewish and non-Jewish participants.

\textbf{Limited focus on the Holocaust}

In thirty-one examples from twenty-three interviews when the Holocaust was mentioned there was very little elaboration on the subject and thus there appeared a lack of empathy for the suffering of the Jews and other persecuted citizens. This was most evident in the first generation who accounted for twenty-one of the thirty-one examples in this section. This would also be what we would expect if we accept the premise mentioned above that British Holocaust awareness had only increased in recent years.


In the extract below first generation member Frieda Reid (FR) was asked about remembering hearing about the Holocaust:

    TM. Do you remember at all hearing about the Holocaust?
    FR. The?
    TM. The Holocaust? Against the/ well the concentration camps and/
    FR. Oh the concentration camps, no only what I heard and read in the papers. I didn't/ apparently there was quite bad wasn't they [sic].

We can see that initially even the word ‘Holocaust’ does not immediately resonate with Frieda and she is unsure what is being asked of her. Only when the interviewer mentions ‘concentration camps’ does this become the sign that she can respond to. Even then all Frieda can do is acknowledge that they were ‘quite bad’ and she does go on to discuss people starving after being asked a further question by the interviewer but this narrative then changes and Frieda discusses war in general and how lucky she was considering she experienced the Blitz. I would suggest that Frieda changed the topic being discussed because she had very little to say about the Holocaust and because by talking about bombing she returned to a theme she felt informed about. I would not argue that she chose not to discuss the Holocaust because it was too disturbing for her because at no point did she seem upset about discussing it, it was simply something Frieda knew little about. In similar fashion in the extract below the interviewer (AL) questions first generation witness Jenny Smith (JS) on her memory of the Holocaust:

    AL: Yeah. Do you perhaps remember anything about the Holocaust at all?
    JS: Holocaust?
    AL: Yeah, in Europe at all was that/
    JS: Well it didn’t really affect us a great deal, it seemed an awful thing at the time.
    AL: Yeah, quite difficult to believe perhaps?
    JS: Yes, it was yes, that must have been dreadful, really dreadful.

Again we have the situation where the first generation member does not elaborate at all on this topic except to offer a brief sympathetic comment about how horrific it must

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6 FG Frieda Reid, GB, TM, 20.2.09, lines 365-369.
7 FG Jenny Smith, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 230-235.
have been. Much like Frieda when Jenny is further prompted by the interviewer she has very little more to say and twenty-five lines later in the transcription of this dialogue the interview actually comes to an end. We should note that the Holocaust as a topic was often not initiated by the interviewee and when the interviewer brought it up using the prompt sheet it was at the end of the interview. Therefore it is entirely justifiable to argue that, especially for the first generation, they were tired by this point and they did not wish to discuss the Holocaust at length. A different methodology where the Holocaust was mentioned earlier in the interview may have produced different results. It is also not my intention to criticise people for their lack of Holocaust knowledge but to highlight the phenomenon in Britain. It is perhaps not surprising that the first generation react in this way considering that even during the war a Ministry of Information (MOI) memorandum stated that ‘coverage [of concentration camps] must be used sparingly and must deal always with treatment of indisputably innocent people. Not with violent political opponents. And not with Jews.’

8 Even in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War the British government did not want to focus on issues of genocide and human rights abuse.

In his seven nation quantitative study of approximately 1,000 participants per country Smith found that Britain was joint first for rejecting negative statements about Jews and second in sympathy; however, he concluded British people were ‘relatively poorly informed about the Holocaust (fifth), less opinionated than most others (sixth), and relatively less supportive of remembrance and teaching (fifth)’.

9 The evidence collected above from the more in-depth interviews in this study would seem to add

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qualitative support to the conclusions Smith drew from his study. Although the qualitative analysis was conducted after Smith’s research had been consulted and so we must accept that this may have influenced results, albeit unintentionally as every care was made to judge the interviews without prejudice. However, if the conclusions drawn are agreed with then there does appear willingness in Britain to acknowledge the humanitarian disaster of the Holocaust without actually confronting the components of what happened. As Dan Stone has pointed out about Holocaust Memorial Day ‘the government can shape the country’s collective memory with a narrative that will undoubtedly follow the pattern of most mainstream narratives of the Holocaust: catastrophe and redemption. The horror of the Holocaust will be occluded in a celebration of our moral superiority.’10 Petersen makes a similar point when she highlights the fact that during its VE Day programming the BBC ‘urged the British television viewing public to remember the plight of European Jewry only insofar as it contributed positively to Britain’s war memory’ which was the liberation of Belsen by British servicemen.11 Therefore, as we have seen in the interview extracts above any facts surrounding what happened get lost in a more simplistic response of disgust of the actual event.

An area that did emerge in nine examples from six interviews was that participants would focus on the distress it caused them to hear about events associated with the Holocaust. In the extract below the interviewer (TM) asks first generation witness Beth Clark (BC), born 1933, about her first memories of seeing the Holocaust during a newsreel at the cinema:

TM: Do you remember other people’s reaction to that?

BC: Yeah, it was silence in the cinema itself, absolute silence. But no-one said, like now turn your head away if you can’t or warn you that they were terrible things to see, they never once said that. Just come on.

TM: Can you think of a reason why that might be?

BC: No I can’t Tom. I don’t think they thought about peoples’ feelings then, after the war, do you, you know, probably they didn’t, there was other things going on wasn’t there.12

When asked about the reaction within the cinema Beth notes the silence but then swiftly continues to discuss the fact that she was not warned about the distressing pictures that were to follow. Thus, rather than commenting upon the experiences of the people she saw in the newsreel Beth’s focus turns to her own anguish at seeing the condition of Holocaust victims. However, Beth would only have been 11 in May 1945 and it could also be argued here that her memories were understandable of a child trying to comprehend what she was seeing. However, whereas from the nine examples in this section four were from the first generation, the other five were from the second generation. It was second generation member Mandy Davison who commented about feeling uneasy at the prospect of watching later representations of the Holocaust. She remarked ‘I mean that Schindler’s List, I’d love to go and watch Schindler’s List and would have done when it was released, I almost can’t bear to go, it’s so sad the Holocaust is so sad that I almost can’t it’s almost like the Imperial War Museum, it’s almost like taking yourself somewhere that you know is going to make you unhappy.’13

Much like Beth above Mandy describes not wishing to see visual depictions of the Holocaust because of the emotional reaction she will experience of seeing the images. This can be classed as somewhat empathetic in that seeing horrific images associated with the Holocaust leads some people to great emotional distress. However, I believe the interviews taken in the wider context do not necessarily enforce this view. Unlike some other interviews, such as John’s description of the Blitz in chapter one, the

12 FG Beth Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 210-217.
13 SG Mandy Davison, GB, TM, 25.8.08, lines 541-545.
interviewees do not show physical signs of emotion when discussing this issue such as long pauses in speech, a lowering of speech volume, or actual tears. Again we have to consider that participants are not necessarily prone to want to display great emotional vulnerability in a one-off interview and the positioning of the Holocaust in the overall interview structure. Also, the role of the scholarly work already completed that may have influenced the analysis of the material as it was expected limited knowledge on the Holocaust would be found. Nevertheless, I would argue the emphasis on the participants’ own emotional response to the Holocaust can be interpreted as a substitute for any actual knowledge and detail on the subject, they do not further elaborate on the topic after comments such as those above. I would contend that whilst the Holocaust does have an effect on these respondents, choosing to focus on their own emotions highlights the fact to the interviewer that they understand the Holocaust was a ‘bad’ event and terrible things happened without having to go into a lot of detail.

However, it should be noted that a little chance personal knowledge or experience led to much fuller accounts about the Holocaust that did show a greater understanding of the events. These only covered six examples from three interviews but came from people who had visited museums, or in the case of Bruce Vaughn, a member of the British Army who found himself at Belsen in April 1945. Bruce commented about the people he encountered that ‘we had to get them away to hospital and they had to be fed on a drip you see. We were under strict orders not to give them anything. I mean they were just like bones, I mean they were on the verge of death.’\textsuperscript{14} He also noted that ‘it made me realise at Belsen a lot of the boys, they wouldn't touch them but I used to hold their hand and it made me realise just what holding a person's hands did.’\textsuperscript{15} Bruce is not one of the participants to respond that he cannot watch Holocaust related

\textsuperscript{14} FG Bruce Vaughn, GB, TM, 3.12.08, lines 116-118.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 363-365.
material. Yet he describes in detail how some of the inmates were cared for, what they looked like, and recognises the effect his own human contact had upon the survivors. It is this type of description that goes so much further than many of the other narratives about the Holocaust because of Bruce’s very different experiences from the majority of the rest of the country. I am not arguing that everyone needs to have had a similar experience to understand, but testimonies such as Bruce’s do highlight the relative lack of knowledge, empathy and little elaboration in many of the other interviews, especially amongst the first generation.

**Group Responses to Pictures One and Two Representing Human Rights Abuses**

The participants’ responses to pictures one and two in the group interviews also sheds interesting light how the Holocaust is understood in England. These pictures were used to elicit a response from the participants about their perceptions of what was happening and were always discussed at the beginning of the group interviews. Therefore their responses and the conclusions drawn here should be seen in the context of comments concerning two very specific stimuli, however, I believe the comments are still useful to illustrate certain arguments and enhance our understanding of how the Holocaust is perceived. Out of the nine group interviews eighteen examples in eight of the interviews referred to picture one as being Belsen or simply a generic concentration camp. In one of the first generation groups, conducted at the home of one of the interviewees, Anne McCall observed of picture one that ‘Well I would say that's Belsen or a concentration camp’. ¹⁶ This assertion, unlike other narratives on the Holocaust was said with confidence and an amount of certainty within the groups. This can be interpreted as demonstrating the iconic status of concentration camps as representative

¹⁶ GD, FG, GB, TM, 18.4.09, line 32.
of the Holocaust in the mindset of the interviewees. This seems not just to be a British phenomenon either as Jensen and Moller in their group interview research in other European countries using the same pictures found that the image of the Russian prisoner of war was always associated with a concentration camp except in Norway where the Holocaust ‘as a whole plays a subordinate role’; and also that the picture was constantly linked with liberation. Picture one actually was taken inside a camp where Russian POWs were being held. However, there is no further discussion within the groups about the identity of victims or how they had come to be in the camp, it was accepted that as it had been identified as a concentration camp there was little more to say about the matter. The extract below is from a third generation group member Stephen Jones discussing picture one:

It looks like Sachsenhausen. In Sachsenhausen they had rows and rows of these buildings in the background and there was like a big open space, erm, and then there was things like statues and then there was places where they used to work and labour and things like that. But I don’t know if they were built sort of similar. But it does take the format of a concentration camp.

Stephen revealed later in the interview that he had been on a school trip to Sachsenhausen and therefore is able to discuss in more detail how the picture could be a concentration camp that he is familiar with. Much like we discussed above Stephen’s personal knowledge of an aspect of the Holocaust gave him the ability to comment more thoroughly on the subject when prompted by the visual cues in the interview. However, what is also interesting is the changing knowledge of certain camps as we progress through the generations. Scholars have noted how Belsen has come to represent what many British people think represents the Holocaust. However, whereas

18 GD, TG, GB, TM, 19.3.07, lines 211-215.
two out of the three group interviews in the first generation and one group interview in the second generation mentioned Belsen, by the third generation it was not mentioned at all. Indeed, other sites such as Auschwitz or, as in the above example, Sachsenhausen were discussed. We can analyse this as an indicator of how Belsen was initially at the forefront of public memory of the Holocaust because of the British involvement there. However, over time, and with further exposure to other areas of the Holocaust through education and the media, British knowledge of other concentration camps has increased and is no longer limited to the experience of Belsen. This is especially true of the third generation group interviews, where all participants over the three groups bar one person attended secondary school after the Holocaust had been introduced to the curriculum in 1991. They spent markedly longer discussing pictures one and two and the Holocaust in general than the other generations.

In another attempt to contextualise picture one a total of five examples from three group interviews used the image to suggest that it could also be a British prisoner of war. Emily Best (EB), a retired housewife aged 87 and born 1922, commented at a first generation group interview conducted at an elderly persons privately run sheltered residence:

EB: This one I assume was a prisoner of war.
TM: Yeah.
EB: ‘Cus he looks very/ ribs are sticking out and/
TM: Yeah yeah.
EB: A prisoner of the Japanese or something20

As would be expected linking the image to British POWs was not repeated elsewhere in any of the other European countries. However, it is an interesting point if we consider how people interpret the image of picture one to integrate it with their own knowledge. Of the three group interviews where this was mentioned two were from the first

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20 GD, FG, GB, TM, 9.5.08, lines 71-75.
generation and one was from the second generation. Therefore these older generations, who as we have discussed are perhaps less informed about the Holocaust through the evolution of Holocaust education in Britain, fill in the gaps with what they do know, in this case the plight of captured British servicemen in the Far East. There is nothing in the picture that precludes it from possibly being a British POW of the Japanese but the interesting point is that this was their first instinct above other, perhaps more obvious, options, such as it being a concentration camp run by the Nazis that was mentioned by the majority of group members over all three generations.

In picture two, as in picture one, there is a certain level of confusion within the groups about what is actually being shown in the image. In eleven examples from seven interviews there was discussion and uncertainty amongst the interviewees over what they were looking at. In the below extract from a second generation group interview conducted at an interviewee’s home Becky King (BK), Ivy Walsh (IW), Julie Green (JG) and Chris Green (CG) discuss picture two:

BK: That could be animals.
IW: Do you reckon?
BK: Yeah.
IW: Oh I think they’re bodies.
JG: Could be what?
CG: No, I’d say they’re people.
JG: I think they’re people.21

Initially Becky presumes that the people in the picture could be animals but three other members of the group suggest that they believe them to be ‘[human] bodies’. Even when they do this though there is not the certainty that was present in picture one when the participants said they believed it was a concentration camp. We can see this above by the prefixing of their thoughts by the participants with ‘I think’ or ‘I’d say’ and a need to keep reinforcing the point through repetition of the assertion. This perhaps

21 GD, SG, GB, TM, 20.7.07, lines 308-314.
reflects the difference in Holocaust iconography between the well known image of the concentration camp and the lesser highlighted mass shootings.

To elaborate on the above argument there was also a significant element in the group interviews, seven examples over four interviews, that tried to place picture two within the context of a concentration camp. The example below is from a third generation group interview conducted in a meeting room at a student Halls of Residence where Stephen Jones (SJ) Adam Scott (AS) and Tariq el Hakiem (TH) are discussing the context of picture two:

SJ: I’m not convinced it’s a concentration camp it doesn’t look very secure for a concentration camp. It looks too big in the background to be a con/ and that just looks like a small fence. When I went to Sachsenhausen the fences were like 10 foot high, barbed wire with watchtowers every so often with armed guard and like, you know/
AS: Silly question but why do you need a big fence to stop a dead body from walking away? This could be a mass grave outside the actual perimeter of the camp/
SJ: It could be yeah
TK: If the Nazis, if they didn’t take these pictures it could be after.
SJ: Yeah.
AS: I was just thinking if you’ve got a concentration camp, you’ve got so much room you have inside/
SJ: Yeah/
AS: If you’re burying people how much room do you have before you can’t fit anymore in the ground and have to move out of the camp.22

Stephen again uses his personal knowledge of his trip to Sachsenhausen, this time to suggest that the picture is not part of a concentration camp because it does not look like he remembers. Yet Adam argues that the scene could still be linked to a concentration camp because it could have been a picture taken outside. This opinion is accepted as completely plausible within the group as a way of explaining the absence of the more iconic images associated with concentration camps that are missing from the picture. Again this demonstrates a tendency to link the Holocaust with images of camps rather than mass shootings such as those carried out by the Einsatzgruppen. It is also an

22 GD, TG, GB, TM, 19.3.07, lines 358-371.
indicator that we should over emphasise the information the third generation tends to know from their education, it is not totally comprehensive and there is still confusion.

However, whereas there is the confusion mentioned above a slightly higher number of examples, nine examples from six interviews, did point out that the scene depicted in the picture was that of a massacre. These examples were weighted towards the second and third generation groups (four examples each) but there was one example from the first generation. For instance, first generation member Vera Dixon commented on picture two that ‘It could have been anywhere, it could have been a village where they massacred a lot of the villagers, there were a lot of villages like that. Where the Germans just went in and massacred everybody.’ This comment is non-specific in detail but is essentially correct in its description of what happened in some areas during World War II. However, not included in this remark or any of the nine examples from this section is the linking of Nazi massacres with the Jewish population. Indeed, in none of the nine examples is the term ‘Jew’ or ‘Jewish’ mentioned, the victims become simply ‘villagers’ like Vera’s account above. I would argue that the evidence from the reaction to the pictures indicates that the method of the murder of the Jewish population during the Holocaust is still strongly linked to the gas chambers at well known sites such as Auschwitz. The process of mass shootings of Jews is less recognised and becomes symbolic of more universal human rights abuses carried out by the Nazis.

Significantly, a high proportion of second and third generation group members suggested that they believed both pictures one and two were taken by allied forces after liberation. There were five examples from five interviews that expressed this opinion for picture one and a further three examples from two interviews for picture two; however, this opinion was not expressed by any of the first generation groups. In the

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23 GD, FG, GB, TM, 6.6.07, lines 577-579.
example below from a third generation group interview, consisting of students and recorded in a meeting room at a Halls of Residence, Elizabeth Smith (ES), Stephen Jones (SJ), Lou Stevens (LS), Adam Scott (AS) and James Burdekin (JB) are discussing when pictures one and two were taken:

ES: They look like they’re just hanging around there. [picture 1]
SJ: I suppose this could be/ because I can’t imagine Germans taking photos, so I suppose this could be towards the end of the war when a camp was liberated, perhaps? Because if/ I can’t imagine Germans taking photos [some laughter] so I would imagine this, I don’t know, an allied/ perhaps allied forces have liberated this camp and started taking photos as evidence of what the Germans were doing. Because they don’t look like they’re working very hard in the background! [laughter]
LS: That’s probably quite similar to this one then [picture 2]. They probably wouldn’t have taken photos# until the end.
AS: Well they wouldn’t have taken photos because they didn’t want the evidence.
SJ and ES: Yeah.
JB: Maybe they wouldn’t have taken photos of graves.\textsuperscript{24}

When Stephen suggests that he couldn’t ‘imagine Germans taking photos’ there is laughter within the group that seems to demonstrate not just an agreement with Stephen but an acceptance that this prospect would be so absurd as to be amusing. Indeed, other members of the group then interject to agree that the Germans would not have created evidence that later could incriminate them. Yet these photos were taken by Germans during the war, so how can we explain the high number of participants who reasoned that this could not be the case?

One explanation could come in the confusion demonstrated in a number of all the interviews conducted of the available evidence for the Holocaust before 1945. In twenty-seven examples from twenty separate interviews the participants repeat the belief that the Holocaust was not known about in Britain, and information about it was not readily available, until after either the discovery of Belsen or the end of the war.

When asked about the first time the British people heard about the Holocaust first

\textsuperscript{24} GD, TG, GB, TM, 19.3.07, lines 222-233.
generation Richard Cox stated that ‘I couldn't tell you exactly when that was. I think it wasn't until they were liberated, I don't think we really knew what was going on- the gas chambers and all that whilst it was happening. I don't think very much came out.’

Furthermore, second generation member Anne Pole also noted that ‘Well I mean the story is that it was after the war when they finally liberated the camps. I can't believe that nobody has said anything before then, but I mean I have no way of knowing whether that was true or not. But I suspect that people knew it was going on and it wasn't convenient to publicise it or do anything about it. I've got a very cynical view of government haven't I [laughter].’

Both examples suggest that it is possible that some people may have known in an official capacity what was happening but both also dismiss the idea that such information was found anywhere in the public domain. These types of views lead to a belief in a kind of secrecy about the Holocaust that would have began with the Germans not publicising what they were doing and could lead to the reaction of the groups above to deciding when pictures one and two were taken. Whilst it is correct that the German hierarchy was not publicising the Final Solution it would be incorrect to state that news of its implementation had not become available to Allied governments and media.

There is no recognition amongst the interviewees that the people of Britain were aware of the mass killings of the Jewish population before 1945. We know that on 17 December 1942 Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, made a detailed declaration on the extermination of the European Jewry to the House of Commons and the House held a two minute silence after he was finished. However, Bolchover has shown how this information was reaching more mainstream British audiences. For instance, in June 1942 he notes that *The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Daily Mail, Evening Standard*,

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25 FG Richard Cox, GB, TM, 30.1.09, lines 451-453.
26 SG Anne Pole, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 402-406.
and *Manchester Guardian* all reported that one million Jews had already been exterminated in Europe.\(^{27}\) He argues that information was ‘abundant and accurate’, however there was scepticism as a result of First World War atrocity propaganda and also a general desensitising of a British public during World War II that was more concerned with its own safety.\(^{28}\) It was also the case that the Jewish community themselves did not pursue further action from Britain for fear of an anti-Semitic backlash at home.\(^{29}\) To further compound the situation during the war the British government then downplayed Jewish suffering in official propaganda, as they did not want to appear to be fighting on behalf of the Jews.\(^{30}\) This did lead to the Jewish situation in Europe not being heavily focussed upon and Nicholas calls the failure of the BBC to highlight Nazi extermination policy as ‘a tragic blot on the BBC’s wartime record’.\(^{31}\) These reasons perhaps combine to demonstrate how the knowledge of atrocities against the Jewish population of Europe is a forgotten aspect of Britain’s war record. Yet it is also not acknowledged now, after the event, and this is why we have the above responses from the participants in this study. It is a belief that allows the British people to maintain the heroic, noble memory of Britain’s role in the Second World War without confronting the issue, even retrospectively, that knowledge of the Holocaust was known about and readily available in Britain from 1942 onwards.

**Attitudes towards Perpetrator Motivation**

A further reason why the participants in the group interviews suggested that Germans would not have taken and recorded images one and two could lie in the way

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\(^{30}\) Cesarani, ‘Great Britain’, p.605.  
Germans as perpetrators are discussed by all the interviewees in the project. The interviewees focussed upon three main themes that they believed facilitated the implementation of the Holocaust. They commented how coercion was used by the Nazis to force people into obedience; a clear distinction between ideological Nazis and other, ordinary, Germans; and finally the propaganda of the Nazi regime to persuade Germans to commit acts of atrocity.

In regard to the first of these three factors above there were eighteen examples from eleven interviews where the participants explicitly suggested that Germans would be killed, or their families harmed, if they did not carry out orders related to the killing of Jews in the Holocaust. There was quite an even spread of these examples from the generations with four examples from the first, eight from the second and, six from the third generation. In the extract below from a third generation group interview university students Stephen Jones (SJ), Adam Scott (AS) and Lou Stevens (LS) are discussing why soldiers followed orders relating to the Holocaust:

SJ… Obviously, the SS and Hitler’s people were obviously loyal to that and the nature of the military was you followed orders, you didn’t disobey orders, it wasn’t like today where you could say ‘well I don’t think that’s right’ and go above someone. It was very ‘well I’m your commanding officer and this is what I’m telling you to do and you’ve got to do it. I suppose anyone who opposed that was either court marshalled or shot.

AS: I think they were just shot weren’t they back then.

LS: Yeah.

SJ: Probably just shot yeah. So I suppose once you see that a couple of times you’re just going to go along with it aren’t you [laughter] 32

Here Stephen contends that ‘anyone who opposed was either court marshalled or shot’ but Adam interrupts to suggest that he feels they ‘were just shot’ taking the court marshal element out of the equation. After he has said this Lou immediately agrees and even Stephen then changes his initial statement to include only the fact that people were shot. Crawford and Foster have noted how school history textbooks emphasise the

32 GD, TG, GB, TM, 19.3.07, lines 324-333.
brutal way the Nazi Party dealt with opposition. They highlight the argument in *The Era of the Second World War* that ‘any opposition or criticism of the Nazis would be ruthlessly dealt with’; and, furthermore, in *Weimar and Nazi Germany* the text suggests that ‘Anyone speaking his or her mind might well end up in the hands of the Gestapo. This could mean prolonged questioning, torture and imprisonment in a concentration camp. How many people would be prepared to expose themselves or their families to this?’

Therefore, there is evidence, presented in school history texts, which highlight how people who contradicted the National Socialist system were dealt with severely and violently. However, it could also be argued that this attitude has permeated beliefs relating to knowledge concerning Holocaust orders in the military and there is a general ignorance that, as has been shown by scholars such as Browning in *Ordinary Men*, soldiers could be loyal to the regime but face no official punishment by refusing to carry out killing duties.

During a family interview for the Clark family Beth Clark (BC) was highlighting an opinion similar to that above that German soldiers or their families would face physical harm for not carrying out killing orders. It was at this point the interviewer (TM) revealed that this was not the case; the reaction of Beth and her daughter Jane (JC) are interesting:

TM: I just going to throw this in and see what you think about it, but would it come as a surprise to you to learn that no German was ever physically harmed, or threatened with physical harm, or their family was threatened with physical harm for not carrying out orders relating to the Holocaust?

BC: You do surprise me Tom, absolutely amazed yeah.

TM: There’s no evidence that ever happened.

BC: Really.

TM: Those who refused were allowed to refuse.

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34 See particularly C. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, (London, 2001), pp. 71-77. This chapter includes a reflection on the first mass killings from Police Battalion 101 and mentions those who could not take part in the shootings and examples of men who transferred back to Germany to avoid taking part in this action again.
BC: Really. I’m absolutely stunned by that…Because the way it’s always put over you see.
JC: Yeah, we’re led to believe/
BC: Yeah, you really have amazed me, saying that.
TM: I mean/
BC: Told you I didn’t like them. [laughs] Switch that off! No, you’ve really amazed me absolutely.35

Beth’s reaction was to comment that she was ‘stunned’ and also to exclaim about Germans that ‘Told you I didn’t like them. [laughs] Switch that off! No, you’ve really amazed me absolutely’. We can infer from her nervous laughter and light-hearted request to stop recording that she did not know how to react to this new information she had been presented with. Her comment about not liking Germans is in complete contrast to the way she was describing them as almost victims forced into a situation where they killed against their wishes. I propose that she was unsure of an acceptable response because the information was outside of her established context for Holocaust perpetrators. This reaction was in contrast to her more assured and measured speech when she was describing her beliefs that soldiers were harmed if they refused because she felt she was giving an informed and correct answer to the interviewer.

The second area mentioned was the distinct difference articulated by the interviewees between fanatical Nazis, who willed and enforced the implementation of the Holocaust, and the rest of the German nation. Twenty-three examples from fifteen interviews were recorded where participants began discussing a clear distinction between Nazis and Germans as a factor in the Holocaust being able to happen. For example, during a third generation group interview Sam Brooker, aged 27 and born 1982, a university graduate and salesman, remarked that ‘you've got two types of

35 FD Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 426–440. On reflection, the interjection by the interviewer here could be seen as a departure from the stated aims of the interviews to allow the participants to freely express their own memories and opinions. In the above extract the interviewer is posing new information for the interviewees to assess and react to. This was not commonplace and this type of exchange was not repeated in subsequent interviews, however, the oral evidence collected here is still used because it effectively demonstrates the arguments presented.
people, you've got people who probably were right behind it who were really there “Hitler all the way” and this is the right thing to do, and I think there was other people who quite easily probably did it because they didn't want to get shot.” You will notice how there is some overlap with the first point about the belief that people would be shot if they did not follow orders. Indeed, in the above example from Rob Wright he begins his statement by first mentioning the loyalty of the SS and ‘Hitler’s people’. However, the point to emphasise here is the belief that there was a fanatical elite, the Nazis, who carry the burden and responsibility for the Holocaust and the vast majority of the rest of the German nation who were compelled to, and were only acting under, strict orders from above. As Eatwell has pointed out after the end of the Second World War ‘there was a tendency to distinguish between good Germans and evil Nazis’. 

Even during the interview with Bruce Vaughn (BV) when the interviewer asked about the Nazis at the camp a perhaps rather surprising answer emerged:

BV… And when we caught Josef Kramer and Irma Grese, the Beast and Beastess of Belsen, they both said we have done nothing wrong 'we were just obeying orders from the Reich’ which technically they were, weren’t they.

TM. How did people feel towards the Germans then?
BV. How did?
TM. How did you feel towards the Germans?
BV. How do I?
TM. Yeah.
BV. Erm, it was bitterness at the time but well, they were being governed by their government as we were, I mean we were just being citizens weren’t we, either way.

We noted earlier how Bruce elaborated more and showed greater empathy during his interview about victims of the Holocaust because of the time he spent at Belsen in 1945 as a serving British soldier, yet even he offers mitigating circumstances for those who ran the camp. He seems to agree with the defence offered by Kramer and Grese that

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36 GD, TG, GB, TM, 23.6.09, lines 357-360.
38 FG Bruce Vaughn, GB, TM, 3.12.08, lines 67-76.
they were only following orders. When asked how he felt towards Germans again the blame is placed at government level and by linking how both British and German people followed their own governments he seems to alleviate any guilt from Holocaust perpetrators below the highest level of office.

Once more we find trends in education that appear to support this view in Britain. In their study of Holocaust education Short and Read found it ‘of concern’ that many students they interviewed ‘considered the Holocaust as the work of a lone individual’. Crawford and Foster concur with this opinion and highlights the fact that ‘In English texts the role of Hitler as the central instigator in the Holocaust occupies an important place’ however, it should be noted that some recent textbooks (*The Era of the Second World War* and *Peace and War*) now mention the role of ‘ordinary’ Germans in either carrying out, or acquiescing to, the Holocaust. Although German textbooks do go further in criticising German society; children are asked to read correspondence between the IG Farben factory and the Auschwitz Commandant to reflect on the guilt of ordinary Germans, not just Nazis. Indeed, Wenzeler comments that one textbook leaves the reader in no doubt that ‘ordinary Germans’ carry guilt. Kansteiner elaborates on this argument in his detailed analysis of the German reaction to the Second World War since 1945. He argues that in the 1950s Germans contented themselves with the fact that they had been led astray by a few fanatical Nazis, however, from the 1980s onwards German society began to deal with the legacy of the Holocaust in German history and explore the role of perpetrators. However, Welzer in his study argues that the collective ‘heroization’ that the later generations show towards their relatives who

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40 Crawford, Foster, *War, Nation, Memory*, pp.29-30.


were contemporary witnesses represents a restoration of the belief that ‘Nazis’ and ‘Germans’ were two different groups.⁴³ Jensen and Moller concur with this argument as in their group interviews in Germany ‘as well as the “mad” Hitler as the main culprit, everything is adduced in defence of the “ordinary German” which can be found in a repertoire of exonerating interpretations’.⁴⁴ Thus there is a similarity in the responses from the German and British oral studies here. However, whereas in Germany it was concluded these narratives occurred because of family loyalty that occluded the developments in education, in Britain it is the education system that still promotes the idea of the Holocaust being the work of a small band of fanatical Nazis.

This evidence from education would only really be relevant for the third generation as the studies highlighted above were looking only at more recent developments and examples from schools. However, this theme is not just found in education and from the end of the war in 1945 there is evidence in British society of an active attempt to quickly reconcile relations with Germany and use the Nazi elite as a scapegoat for the crimes of the era. Kushner argues that although the Germans and particularly the SS were portrayed as sadistic at first, as early as the summer of 1945 new Cold War alliances had prompted a fiercely anti-German propaganda film on the liberation of Belsen to be cancelled aiding the ambivalent attitude of Britons towards Germans from 1945 onwards and thus ensuring the role of ordinary Germans at Belsen was never discussed.⁴⁵ The BBC also had a role in relation to promoting how the British people should think of the German population. During 1944-45 the BBC did focus on the topic of Germany near defeat. Broadcasts did not overtly criticise the German

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people and mentioned their suffering and shortages. There were reports from Belsen and Buchenwald but these did not, nor were they designed to, produce an anti-German backlash. Nicholas argues that ‘the BBC ended the war with a plea of restraint towards the German people… They were to blame for the Nazis, but the Nazis were to blame for the war… the British people were not now, in the main, interested in vengeance.’

This was a practical stance considering the changing political alliances and the rise of the Soviet Union that necessitated a strong West Germany becoming a part of NATO. As Bloxham has pointed out the British and Americans were happy to accept the German notion of a dividing line between hardened Nazis and the majority of ordinary Germans because it offered a psychological closure to the events of World War II. It should be noted that obviously not all Germans believed in National Socialist ideology, but we are dealing here with the readiness to believe that very shortly after the war all the Nazis had been brought to justice and therefore, because of the relatively small numbers, an entire nation was duped by a comparatively tiny elite. This readiness was not born out of nothing, as a Mass Observation random interview sample conducted in March 1943 shows ‘Between 50-60% keep the distinction between Nazis and [other German] people more or less intact.’ Therefore, the climate of feeling was suitable to accept the dividing line of a small number of Nazis and war criminals compared to the majority of innocent, fearful and duped Germans so shortly after the end of the war and this continuing belief today not only in the contemporary witnesses but also strongly in the second and third generations.

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46 Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, p.163.
The third area emphasised when discussing Holocaust perpetrators by the participants was the role of propaganda. The effect of propaganda on the actions of the German people was mentioned in twenty examples from thirteen interviews. Here its relevance seems much stronger in the second and third generations which account for nine and eight of the examples respectively, as opposed to three examples from the first generation. What is striking here is the way the German people are characterised as helpless in the face of the level of propaganda produced by the Nazis. Often interviewees would emphasise the level of influence of Nazi misinformation - the word ‘brainwashed’ was used in nine separate examples, and the term ‘indoctrinated’ in four separate examples. For instance third generation member Tim Clark reasoned that ‘he [Hitler] set up the Hitler Youth as well didn’t he to brainwash young children, and once you start brainwashing children they actually believe you, that’s what they grow up believing as well, children are quite impressionable so these kids, I think, truly believed they were doing the right thing. As opposed to adults who have already got formed opinions and were probably less susceptible to that kind of brainwashing.’49 Tim focuses here on the efforts to influence children but the examples from the other participants were not just confined to this area. However, an emphasis on Nazi propaganda directed towards children was highlighted in the group interviews when picture five was discussed. Sixteen examples from eight group interviews focussed on the children and discussed them within the context of the Hitler Youth. For example, in a second generation group interview Grace Campbell, aged 42 and born 1966, a housewife, observed that ‘they had the Hitler Youth didn’t they. But it's indoctrination from an early level isn't it so that's what they're trying to teach.’50 This is typical of the comments for picture five, the focus of the group members was upon the ways the

49 TG Tim Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 246-251.
50 GD, SG, GB, TM, 19/7/09, lines 165-166.
Nazis spread their propaganda to children through the Hitler Youth and the way that propaganda ‘indoctrinated’ young Germans to pro-Nazi opinions. Again we can look to the education system for evidence of where the ideas surrounding this particular discourse emanates. In a survey of British and German school textbooks Wenzeler found that in Britain propaganda was given prominence over other motivating factors. However, by framing the effect of propaganda in this way it has the effect of alleviating all responsibility from any perpetrators for their actions. It offers a mitigating circumstance for peoples’ actions because of this belief of helplessness to act independently in the face of overwhelming propaganda.

Schindler’s List

When discussing how interviewees gained their knowledge of the Holocaust the media, such as films and television, were mentioned frequently. One particular film that was referenced on twenty occasions in fourteen interviews was Schindler’s List. This was popular across the generations with six references from the first, eight references from the second and six references from the third generations. It is interesting that when the interviewees discussed Schindler’s List they all highlighted the realism and historical value of the film. For instance, when discussing the film first generation member Joan Dyer commented how ‘it just shows you what happened really doesn't it, it brings it back to the front, to see how things were.’ Here she is suggesting that the film has informed her about the Holocaust by demonstrating ‘how things were’, rather than recognising the limitations of representation through the medium of a cinematic feature film. It is estimated that Schindler’s List was seen by one quarter of the population of the UK and in 1995 every secondary school was given a free copy for

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52 FD Dyer/ Wright, GB, TM, 5.6.08, lines 420-421.
education purposes. However, Wall has criticised this use as he argues films ‘allow no time for reflection, debate or verification. We are carried along by its narrative flow. We are involved with individual characters as opposed to broader issues.’ The reaction from the interviewees would seem to support this view that Schindler’s List is seen as an accurate representation rather than a cinematic interpretation of events.

However, what is perhaps even more surprising is that first generation witnesses who were close to events also view the film in this way. First generation member Hannah Dodd, aged 79 and born 1928, a retired senior lecturer who now gives talks to the public about the Holocaust as she came to Britain on the Kindertransport, noted that ‘I'm very impressed when I speak to groups, nearly everybody has seen Schindler's List and they ask me whether I think that portrays it truly and I say “yes, but it doesn't go to the whole extent because nobody can”’. Obviously Hannah did not experience the events depicted in the film as she left Europe before September 1939, however, her experience does give her a certain amount of authority to the public she speaks to and she is happy to tell her audiences that Schindler’s List does depict the Holocaust truly, even considering the extra point that it could never be completely comprehensive.

Furthermore, Bruce Vaughn (BV), who witnessed conditions at Belsen at the end of the war, was asked by the interviewer (TM) about Schindler’s List:

TM. Have you ever seen Schindler’s List?
BV. I saw that yes.
TM. What did you think of that? Bearing in mind you've had personal experience/
BV. It was typical of how it was.
TM. Yeah.
BV. I mean there was people just being marched along to their death.55

54 FD Dodd, GB, TM, 3.4.08, lines 126-128.
55 FG Bruce Vaughn, GB, TM, 3.12.08, lines 392-397.
Bruce also repeats what other interviewees articulated about the movie that it depicts a high level of historical accuracy in relation to real events. This is of course most striking because, as we have seen earlier, Bruce was present at Belsen and witnessed scenes that he may have found even more harrowing than those in *Schindler’s List* yet he maintains the film is ‘typical of how it was’. Other forms of media were mentioned concerning how people attained knowledge of the Holocaust yet it was *Schindler’s List* that was easily the most frequently mentioned. The fact that so many interviewees, including those who were relatively close to the Holocaust, noted its accuracy to actual events highlights the responsibility of filmmakers in their representation of historical events such as the Holocaust. Media such as this is where many people gain their knowledge of certain events from and, whilst I am not going to repeat the academic debate about *Schindler’s List* here\(^56\), perhaps filmmakers should be aware that their productions can lead to narrow or sanitised versions of events that are believed to be comprehensive and truthful by the public.

**Evidence of Anti-Semitism**

What was surprising from the interviews was the significant instances where interviewees mentioned that they had overheard anti-Semitic attitudes in others or actually displayed it themselves. This was noted in eleven instances from ten interviews with seven of those examples being people who had overheard anti-Semitic attitudes and four participants actually making anti-Semitic comments. Furthermore, as well as these eleven examples there were also participants who repeated Nazi propaganda with seven examples from seven interviews alluding to the wealth of the Jews and three examples from three interviews repeating opinions grounded in the positivity of

eugenics. We shall look at examples for all of these categories but we will begin with first generation member Paul Clark (PC) who, in a family interview with his wife Beth Clark (BC) and daughter Sara Clark (SC), vocalised his opinions about the Jews:

PC. Yes. I never particularly liked them at all you know. I think it was their attitude when you were together. If there was a Jew there “I’m one of God’s chosen people.” This was their attitude.
BC. They were quite ruthless as well weren’t they you said?
PC. Yeah.
SC. Compared to the Arabs?
PC. Yeah. They rounded you up, took your ammunition, lined you up against a wall and killed you, just like that. The Arabs just took your rifle and whatever you’d got and off they went into the woods out the way, but they’ve never been favourites of mine – Jews. I’m sorry for all the kiddies that got killed, well for all of them that got killed, but er that’s how it is.57

What Paul is describing here is the time he spent with the British Army in Palestine from 1945-47 and the opinions he formed of the Jewish people during this time. Talking about his experiences in Palestine with his family Paul had expressed these opinions before and his family had prior knowledge of them. In her interview Sara was asked about her father’s time in Palestine and commented that she heard her father say he ‘would never trust the Jews’.58 However, when discussing this Sara also notes that ‘It may have made him more tolerant to the way people think about Arabs and Muslims’; and also of his opinions that ‘you are moulded a lot in your late teens, early twenties with what you’re dished out in life’.59 Thus, Sara approaches her father’s views firstly by focussing on his tolerance to Muslims rather discussing his contrasting intolerance to Jews. Furthermore, she then highlights Paul’s opinions in the context of his experiences as a young man. Whilst Sara does not share these views they appear to be presented almost as an idiosyncrasy of her father’s character, gained during his formative years in his late teens and early twenties. There is a noticeable link here to the conclusions of the Welzer study, discussed in the introduction, where the later generations would create

57 FD Clark, GB, TM, 25.1.09, lines 399-407.
58 SG Clark, GB, TM, 25.1.09, line 191.
positive narratives for family member’s negative war past. Here, it is not so much creating a positive slant on the past but emphasising a tolerance towards Islam in her father’s character than attempt to discuss the anti-Semitic views he holds. There is no evidence from their interviews or the remainder of the family interview that Beth or Sara share these views. They do, however, appear to accept that this is Paul’s view through his experiences and do not try to challenge his perceptions. Paul does recognise here that suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust (this conversation was in the context of a general discussion about the Holocaust) and that he is sorry for ‘all of them that got killed’ however, he cannot separate this from his own associations with the Jews from his time in Palestine. This would seem to indicate that Paul realises what he is saying is not necessarily an acceptable view to hold and therefore offers some reconciliatory words in regard to the Holocaust. However, he does not retract his original statement and thus his opinion stands in contrast to what he consciously knows is the sociably recognised way to respond.

As was mentioned there were also seven examples from participants who displayed a latent or subconscious anti-Semitism by repeating Nazi propaganda by suggesting that all the Jews of Europe were wealthy and exerted undue political influence. In the below example from a first generation group interview conducted in a retirement home Kerry Webb (KW), Robert Davey (RD), David Turner (DT), and Steph Doyle (SD) were discussing the reasons for going to war and the Jewish community:

KW: The persecution of the Jews.
RD: Oh.
KW: I don’t think we’d have started a war for that.
RD: Well, I don’t know, the Jewish community were very powerful, financially and politically.
KW: Well that’s why we were afraid of them.
RD: Very powerful. No doubt about it.
All four of the participants talking here either state or agree with the fact that the Jewish community was not only wealthy but that they exerted a great deal of influence over the whole of the country, Kerry even goes so far as to note that it is for this reason that ‘we were afraid of them’. What is striking is the certainty with which the participants comment on and agree with each other over this ‘fact’. At one point David, perhaps feeling the need to justify what the group is saying, attempts to turn the generalisations the participants are making into a positive characteristic of the Jewish community by suggesting that non-Jews were simply ‘jealous of the Jews ability to make money’. However, Steph’s comment near the end of the extract that the Jewish community had also been taking control of Germany is concerning because it has the effect of being a justification for the Holocaust. If the group believed that the Jews were surreptitiously taking control of Germany then they believed the arguments Hitler and the Nazis put forward to validate their policy towards the Jews. This was not just found in this study, in the interviews he conducted in Germany Welzer found this ‘rich Jew’ stereotype also still present in the attitudes of the interviewees, though he did conclude that by the third generation it had completely disappeared.\footnote{Welzer, ‘Grandpa Wasn’t a Nazi’, pp.20-21.} However, although four of the examples were from the first generation and two from the second generation in this section, there was one example in this study from the third generation. Again perhaps this is not helped by the British education system as Short and Read have even noted that a couple\footnote{GD, FG, GB, TM, 9.5.08, lines 616-631.}
of school textbooks, including the most popular text, continue to wrongly assert that all Jews were wealthy.\textsuperscript{62}

As well as the above misconception a further three examples were recorded where the interviewees showed some positive comments towards the Nazi eugenics programme and Nazi propaganda surrounding racial purity. Whilst not being vastly numerous these examples are still worth commenting upon for the extent of misunderstanding from the participants. Second generation member Zoe Baines, aged 51 and born 1956, a school teacher, argued ‘If you look at Germans now they're all tall, blond, very athletic, and you know he got rid of all the Jews, but he also got rid of everybody with disability didn't he as well, so that gene pool was taken out of the German race.’\textsuperscript{63} I would suggest that from the evidence of the remainder of Zoe’s interview that she is not an anti-Semite nor is she sympathetic to the far right or any neo-Nazi white supremacist movement- she even discusses her own gypsy heritage. Sykes has shown how since the Second World War overt anti-Semitism has been more a secondary concern of far right organisations in Britain who focussed more on Asian and Black immigration, and that these organisations never gained mass popular support.\textsuperscript{64} It is this more latent anti-Semitism, what Brook has termed a ‘subtle prejudice’ in society, such as the BBC News story where the Jewishness of a man on bail was highlighted even though it had no relevance to the case and the BBC later had to apologise\textsuperscript{65}, that we have seen in some of the narratives. The extent to which Zoe casually stereotyped contemporary Germans and linked this belief to Nazi racial policy is worrying if it is a trend that is repeated in a significant minority of British people and

\textsuperscript{62} Short, Read, \textit{Issues in Holocaust Education}, p.63.
\textsuperscript{63} FD Baines, GB, TM, 6.6.08, lines 270-272.
\textsuperscript{64} A. Sykes, \textit{The Radical Right in Britain}, (Hampshire, 2005), pp.99-136.
this is not being challenged and corrected by the education system or through effective public awareness.

However, despite evidence from the interviews above that anti-Semitic attitudes were sufficiently noticed by participants to be mentioned in ten interviews and actual anti-Semitic attitudes to be voiced in a further ten interviews, in conversations with two Jewish families in the study I would argue that any instance of anti-Semitism was actually downplayed or ignored. Indeed, in both three generational family interviews this instance was recorded on ten occasions in five separate interviews. In the example below the interviewer had asked first generation witness Rebecca Solomon (RS) if she had experienced any anti-Semitism when she arrived in England:

RS. Not at all, ever, never, but then I never told anybody. One boy in the school said to me/ I didn't know/ well he found out in some way, I suppose he said ‘oh I didn't know Jews were like you’ or something like that, he meant it in a complimentary way. No, the only thing I ever experienced was where you come from and about being foreign but never anything about religion and Jewish/ never ever.  

The way Rebecca frames the comment from a school colleague is more striking when we compare it to how she described returning to Vienna and interacting with Austrians after the war:

they're not terribly friendly people in Vienna really. They wouldn't let us into the flat where I lived they just opened the door/ well that was a long time ago, they wouldn't let us in to have a look at the flat at all. It was a vet, I remember it said vet on the door, I just said we used to live here and could I look around and no, they wouldn't let us in, they were suspicious. But it was a long long time ago, when they were still/ they may even have still been Nazis.

In the first extract Rebecca makes excuses for what in hindsight was an overtly anti-Semitic comment, even if it was said by a child. The child was paying Rebecca a personal compliment in that it seems he was commenting that Rebecca did not fit with his view of Jews. However, rather than being a ‘positive’ comment as Rebecca

66 FG Rebecca Solomon, GB, TM, 23.8.08, lines 96-100.
67 Ibid., 432-438.
described the undertones would seem to suggest that he viewed all other Jews in a negative way and was surprised to find they were not all like that. In the second extract Rebecca begins by telling us that people in Vienna are not friendly. Then, because the people who now lived in the flat where she used to reside would not let them in she comments that they ‘were suspicious’ and ‘may even have still been Nazis’. There are no extenuating circumstances offered for the Austrian family as there was for the English schoolboy. In his autobiographical work Seidler argues that ‘There was widespread gratitude amongst the refugee population… There was little sense that England could have done more to save the Jews, or to provide a haven in a time of need.’

Seidler’s work, as well as others, was consulted before the interviews were analysed. His writings such as those quoted above may have had an influence on the reading of the narratives from the Jewish families on this topic and should also be borne in mind when he is quoted later in this chapter. However, I believe the extracts used support the comparison to Seidler’s work. In two Jewish families interviewed there does seem to not only be a gratitude towards England (both first generation members were Kindertransport refugees) but also a reluctance to recognise anti-Semitic elements within England both during the Second World War and afterwards.

However, despite this general downplaying of anti-Semitism within the Jewish families there was an interesting generational conflict within the Dodd family. Both Jewish families discussed how their foreign sounding surnames were changed to more English sounding alternatives, yet in the Dodd family there was disagreement over the reasons behind this. First generation witness Hannah Dodd explained that the change was ‘because the children found it difficult at school with the [says previous surname], people couldn’t spell it, before my third daughter arrived we changed it to [says current

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The actual names she mentions in the interview have not been included here to ensure the anonymity of the participants. However, the point to be taken from the extract is that Hannah describes the reason for the change in practical terms to encourage greater clarity rather than for any discriminatory reasons. However, when second generation member John Dodd, aged 57 and born 1950, a maker of musical instruments, was asked about this he considered that ‘allegedly it was because patients had difficulty in spelling it. This is what I've been told again and again and have asked repeatedly over the years, and that's the answer I've always got, so if I hear it three times it must be true. But I still asked the question and I can't believe that possibly, possibly subconsciously and unintentionally it was intended to eliminate a potential source of anti-Semitism.’

John repeats the idea that it was practical to change the surname although he comments that it was for the patients (his father was a dentist) rather than school but he also adds an extra element from his own belief. John has never been told directly but does suppose that there was an element of anti-Semitism that led the family to change their name from a Jewish sounding surname to a more English one. However, when the third generation witness Louise Dodd, aged 24 and born 1981, an intern at a museum, is asked to comment upon this she remarked ‘I mean they had to change their name because/ as a result of anti-Semitism, that was my impression. Because it's very difficult to be a practising medic with a foreign name, well it was, I don't know if it's still the same now.’

In Louise’s interview the idea that the family needed to change their surname simply for practical reasons has gone and is replaced by the belief that it was to prevent anti-Semitism. She does not say where she has acquired this belief from but her father’s own misgivings about his mother’s stated reason for changing the name has become more firmly solidified in Louise’s own opinion.

69 FG Hannah Dodd, GB, TM, 3.4.08, lines 13-15.
70 SG John Dodd, GB, TM, 3.4.08, lines 308-312.
71 TG Louise Dodd, GB, TM, 3.4.08, lines 187-189.
become a belief of fact. This case study of the Dodd family would also seem to indicate that the gratitude of the Jewish people towards Britain that Seidler argued above may lessen through the family if the later generations are more willing to accept the possibility of anti-Semitic attitudes within England having a direct affect on their family.

We can take this point about anti-Semitism in relation to the change of family name further and note examples from both families where they seemed to hint at the fact they had not fully assimilated as ‘British’ even over seventy years since the first generation member came over on the Kindertransport. This was recorded in thirteen examples from five interviews, although eight of these examples were from one participant, Rebecca Solomon, and neither of the third generation members alluded to the fact they felt that they themselves had not assimilated. During her interview first generation witness Hannah Dodd stated that ‘It's also says something about all the Jews consider themselves a family and you keep on meeting members of your family all over the place and that's lovely, and very supportive when everybody else seems to be against you.’72 In the remainder of her interview Hannah is very complimentary towards Britain and does not explicitly comment about Britain not doing enough to help her and other Jews. However, this comment would seem to suggest that there is a sense that Hannah draws her most consistent support from her Jewish connections rather than her British identity. Indeed, the comment about the Jewish community being ‘supportive when everybody else seems to be against you’ would indicate that she does not preclude the possibility of the British community at some point turning against her and the only support would come from fellow Jews. In the Solomon family second generation member Tom Solomon also noted that ‘I consider myself yeah British

72 FG Hannah Dodd, GB, TM, 3.4.08, lines 489-491.
though I think it’s important to be aware/ I think of myself almost as a member of the world community as much as anything, and that's an attitude that should be more common.” Much like Hannah’s comment Tom does not consider himself to only have a British identity but thinks of himself as a ‘member of the world community’ also. In the interview Tom commented that he did not follow the Jewish faith or feel particularly connected to the Jewish community. Yet he still feels that his British identity is not enough and thus makes this statement about being an international citizen. In his autobiographical work Seidler has commented how he felt pressure from his parents to ‘become English’ and, as a Jew, ‘learn to keep your head down’. Yet this assimilation was somehow forced rather than completely willed and thus the comments from the first and second generation Jewish interviewees indicate that they feel ‘British’ but do not completely embrace this and thus still identify with other communities, whether those are Jewish or international.

**Summary**

This chapter has focussed more on the representation, rather than direct inherited memory of the Holocaust in Britain, because of the fact that the majority of British people did not directly experience events surrounding the Holocaust. Nevertheless this does not mean that we have not seen evidence of collective ways of describing Nazi racial policies. We began by discussing some possible reasons for seemingly little elaboration or empathy from the participants when discussing victims of the Holocaust and also how the picture stimulus in the group interviews led to rather narrow, iconic descriptions of concentration camps. The debate from the interviewees also focussed on their opinions of the perpetrator and how these narratives tended to

73 SG Tom Solomon, GB, TM, 23.8.08, lines 36-38.
74 Seidler, *Shadows of the Shoah*, p.4.
highlight how the Holocaust was either committed by a few fanatical Nazis or that ordinary Germans were coerced into taking part either through mortal threats or by emphasising the effectiveness of propaganda. Towards the end of our discussion we noted some concerning anti-Semitic attitudes in the responses from the interviewees and also some responses from British Jews concerning anti-Semitism and British identity. Though it should be noted that it would be wrong to suggest these two families were a representative study, though they are two useful case studies to contrast some of the attitudes from the non-Jewish participants.
Chapter 6- Allies

The final part of this project is concerned with how the participants reacted to the topics of Britain’s main allies and enemies during the war. Often the discussion of these in the interviews was prompted by the interviewer using the prompt sheet. These topics were placed on the prompt sheet partly because of their prominence as a subject for discussion in the secondary literature. Therefore the use of them in the interviews and the subsequent reading of the responses were in the context of works already completed in this area. Only one participant remembered seeing Canadian troops, the main discussion was centred on meeting Americans. Similarly, fighting Italians was mentioned infrequently whereas the Germans, followed by the Japanese, were the popular topics when discussing ‘the enemy’. The reaction to enemies will be discussed in chapter seven, in this chapter we will first look at narratives about the Americans and then survey responses from participants in relation to the Russians and the Eastern Front. Americans were the foreign group that the majority of British people had most contact with during the war and their arrival in Britain caused great interest and inevitably British people were going to have contact with American GIs that would shape attitudes towards them. A Mass Observation report from April 1943 commented that the ‘presence of Americans in this country has… made little difference to the balance of favourable and unfavourable opinion’ but also that it ‘considerably increased the number of people who see both good and bad qualities in the Americans.’\(^1\) As we shall see in this chapter these good and bad qualities that people emphasised are still evidently present in the attitudes of the participants for this project. We shall explore further some of these attitudes whilst also looking at how American filmic

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\(^1\) File Report 1669, March 1945, *Attitudes to Foreigners*, 
representations of the war are discussed. We shall also survey the small amount that is mentioned about the Russians role in the war and offer some suggestions for this.

Positive Comments About Americans

Praising Americans for their generosity was a positive trait emphasised by the participants. This was recorded in thirteen examples from twelve interviews, although this was heavily biased towards the first generation, with nine examples; however, it was split quite evenly between the genders with men accounting for five examples and women four. Conversely, a Mass Observation report March 1945 found that emphasis of the generosity and friendliness of Americans was ‘almost entirely confined to the feminine replies’.\(^2\) This is not the case here for the interviewees, although the male respondents who discussed American generosity were children during the war and they would not have been included in Mass Observation reports of the period. That this knowledge has not been significantly repeated in the later generations is possibly indicative of the fact that this topic was brought up by the interviewer, and after prompting the first generation members were reminded of some memories that they shared. However, this is unlike the ad hoc memories, the ‘snippet’ style stories, conveyed in the more open interview section at the beginning which were more prominent to the first generation participants and so more likely to have been also discussed within the family previously, outside of the interview setting. All of the narratives bar one, which mentioned the Lend-Lease program, focussed on the way Americans would hand out treats and other foodstuffs that were not readily available in wartime Britain. First generation member Beth Clark recalled:

…my dad worked nights sometimes and sometimes he used to take me to Rugby, now why, on the train, I don’t know, why we went I really don’t know Tom. But it was, Rugby station, I don’t know whether it is, I think it is still a big junction. And I’ll always remember this one day, standing on the platform, I can remember it so clearly, and this train pulled in and it was full of Americans, and this one chap hung his head out the window and he said [in American accent] “Would you like some candy?” [laughs] Well, I didn’t know what he was talking about! [laughter] And then he give me this big thing of sweeties, I can remember that part of it very plain. 

The contrast in this narrative between what Beth can remember clearly and what she is unsure about is quite striking. The peripheral details about why her dad had taken her on the train or why they are in Rugby she cannot remember. Yet the fact that she received a bag of sweets from a GI who was on the train that pulled into the station Beth remarks that this she can recall ‘very plain’ and ‘[she’ll] always remember this one day’. This indicates that what happened is relatively important to Beth and was significant enough to be so clearly remembered in her mind and is the story she tells when asked about her memories of Americans in England which does give a one sided, but very positive opinion of them.

As well as their generosity many interviewees reported that Americans were fun to be around and re-told stories where they had good times in their company. This accounted for twenty examples from sixteen interviews, though twelve of these examples were from first generation females, indicating a bias towards young women on the Home Front who described American presence in this way. These stories revolved around memories about spending time with Americans in social settings. However, there is evidence that there was an acknowledgement from those who enjoyed spending time with the Americans that this was deemed improper by other sections of society and there is some conflict in their narratives concerning the

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3 FG Beth Clark, GB, TM, 14.6.07, lines 341-349.
memories of this. In a first generation group interview conducted at a participants home

Anne McCall (AM) discusses this with Molly Pahars (MP) and the interviewer (TM):

AM… the Yanks, you were thought of/ frowned upon a bit wasn't you?
MP. Yeah.
AM. Because all our Tommies was here as well, the soldiers, and I mean they hadn't got anything. Well they couldn't take you/ I mean the first time I went in the circle at The Empire was it, it was with a Yank, because he'd got loads of money only the best and a big box of chocolates you see. So nobody in their right mind is going to refuse that are they? Hey?
TM. Oh yeah, wartime.
AM. Yeah, [laughs] wartime you see, but yes I remember the Yanks very well. 4

Anne and Molly were both born in 1926 and so would have been teenagers during the war years. Anne notes that they were ‘frowned upon’ for seeing Americans and highlights how it was because the British soldiers did not have the means to take them out or get them good things such as chocolate. In this sense Anne seems to be suggesting that the reason she felt she was ‘frowned upon’ was because it was seen as choosing the material rewards an American boyfriend could offer over the British Tommy. The participants comments would suggest she is uneasy over this unpatriotic act as Anne appears to show a certain amount guilt as she seeks reassurance from the interviewer that ‘nobody in their right mind’ would refuse the advances of an American with access to such material goods. When the interviewer notes that it was wartime Anne repeats the phase and says out loud ‘wartime you see’ seemingly to legitimise the actions to herself and those listening. Seemingly, in the context of the interview setting Anne recognises the need to justify her actions possibly because she is aware that what she did was frowned upon by certain sections of the community.

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4 GD, FG, GB, TM, 18.4.09, lines 1134-1142.
Negative Views of Americans

However, the narratives about the Americans were not all positive and there were also a significant number of examples that described them negatively. Indeed twenty two examples from eighteen interviews highlighted the fact that Americans had more than the British but also that they flaunted it in an arrogant manner. Again this is heavily weighted towards the first generation, possibly for the same reasons as noted previously, with fifteen examples; however, the majority of those examples, ten, are from females. This is a surprise when we consider that more females enjoyed spending time with Americans, and these Americans were in direct competition with British men for the female’s attentions, we may have expected a larger number of men to express negative opinions. We must again look to the relative ages of those who were interviewed and note that during the war the majority of the first generation males interviewed were children and therefore not in competition with American GIs for female attention. However, this was not always the case, for instance, first generation member Richard Cox commented:

We had a superb dance hall in Weston-Super-Mare, an oval shape and then a balcony all the way round was tables and chairs and things. And we enjoyed the company of our local girls dancing to bands that you wouldn't know/ dance, called dance bands in those days. And it was a delightful time really, as I say I was about 15/16 at the time. And/ yes about 16, and then the Americans arrived and the favourite phrase is they’re overpaid, oversexed and over here, that's what they said. And they just took over and the girls were being gullible, and/ I mean they had the money and these Yanks, Yanks we called them, they didn't like that, didn't like being called Yanks, they came over and they came into the dance hall and they just took the girls over and the girls lapped it up of course. So exciting, just like the films, because these young American soldiers they looked like they do on the films, yeah you know “they’re going to take me back to the States when this is all over” and a lot of them did. And that lasted until I actually joined up, so I missed out on the girls.5

During this extract Richard repeats the iconic phrase of ‘overpaid, oversexed and over here’, an insulting phrase used by British people to complain about the attitudes of

5 FG Richard Cox, GB, TM, 30.1.09, lines 284-296.
American servicemen whilst they were staying in Britain. However, the underlying tone to this description appears to be one of bitterness aimed at both the Americans for flaunting their relative wealth and at the British girls for being superficial enough to then ignore the native British young men. Richard does mention one facet of his relationship with Americans where he and other British men could regain some level of superiority and this was by calling the GIs ‘Yanks’ as ‘they didn’t like that’. This seems to be an area where Richard felt he was no longer powerless and could affect the Americans, even if it was only a momentary irritant for them, as he could not compete with their financial influence. Finally Richard’s extract ends with not so much anger but more of a lament when he acknowledges that he ‘missed out on the girls’ because of the arrival of the American GIs. Nicholas has written that relations with Americans were hampered by feelings of jealousy and envy towards their situation compared to the British situation. Feelings did not get off to a good start when America did not immediately enter the war and were not helped when the British people began to see how much better off were the Americans than themselves. A further source of contention was when American films focussed on US heroism and the British felt they were not being credited enough for their own role in the war. As Nicholas writes ‘an uncomfortable sense of dependence underpinned [the British] attitude towards the USA’. Even during the Second World War American arrogance seems to have been the top reason why some people had negative feelings towards Americans. A Mass Observation report from January 1947 quoted a question to the National Panel from

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6 S. Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Homefront Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45*, (Manchester, 2006), p.179. See pp.172-179 for a fuller account of Britain’s relations with the USA as seen and promoted through BBC wartime propaganda.
1945 where, of those who disliked Americans, the top category (24 per cent) was because of their ‘boastfulness’.\(^7\)

Throughout the interviews there did appear a cross generational and cross gender agreement that America did not sufficiently recognise the role played by Britain in aiding victory in World War II. This is recorded in twenty four examples from nineteen interviews with seven examples from the first generation, twelve from the second generation and five from the third generation. Furthermore, of these twenty four examples fifteen are solely concerned with what the interviewees view as the misrepresentation of Britain’s war role in American movies. In the below example from a third generation group interview conducted at a University Halls of Residence Scott Simmonds (SS) aged 22 and born 1987, a student; Dawn James (DJ), aged 25 and born 1983, a teaching assistant; and Alan Byrne (AB), aged 32 and born 1977, a teacher, respond to the interviewer’s (TM) question about American movies:

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TM. What do you think about American movies of the Second World War?
DJ. [laughs]
SS. Very American/
DJ. Let's say no more.
SS. We saved everybody on our own/
DJ. Let's change history.
SS. Yeah #U571.
DJ. Pearl Harbor.
SS. I'm sorry that was a British crew that got the German submarine in the Atlantic/
DJ. I think Americans are very much/
SS. Not Americans in the Pacific.
DJ. They don't focus on the bad points/
AB. Jon Bon Jovi rescued World War II I think you'll find it according to that film [laughter].
SS. And it was taken to Bletchley Park #the Enigma machine.
DJ. Actually that was on recently, I watched that recently Enigma.
SS. You could say it was Bletchley Park that actually saved the war for us.\(^8\)
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After the initial question by the interviewer Scott and Dawn confidently and openly mock all American movies commenting about how the USA ‘saved everybody on [their] own’ and how they ‘change history’. No-one else in the group disagrees with these statements and Scott continues by citing the example *U571* as a particularly incorrect film where America assumes the credit for breaking the German submarine code that actually the British Navy and Bletchley Park achieved. At one point Alan joins in the mocking by suggesting that Jon Bon Jovi, a lead actor in *U571*, actually ‘rescued World War II’. Finally, to reclaim the recognition of this event for Britain and not the USA Scott then suggests that ‘it was Bletchley Park that actually saved the war for us’. As this is the one area when discussing Americans that gained a significant cross generational agreement of opinion it could be argued that this is a topic that the English participants considered important and galvanised strong opinions. Such was the furore over *U571* in Britain that it was mentioned in the House of Commons when the Labour MP Brian Jenkins commented that the film was ‘an affront to the memories of the British sailors who lost their lives in the action’, and the then Prime Minister Tony Blair replied ‘I entirely agree with what you say’.9

However, this is not necessarily a recent phenomenon, popular anti-American feeling can be detected almost immediately after the war with the film *Operation Burma* that suggested Americans were responsible for re-capturing Burma.10 The press and public reaction against this film caused Warner Brothers to withdraw it after only one week in British cinemas, although from the evidence of the interviews it would appear to be an emotional response to American movies that persists still today and in later generations. Again education may be responsible for shaping this by over stating Britain’s role in World War II and thus increasing the expectations of how this should

be portrayed in filmic representations. Nicholls has pointed out that in school textbooks Britain is always portrayed as playing a major war role, with emphasis on 1940/41 as setting an example to the rest of the world, which serves to elevate Britain’s position from third of the Big Three to that of a relative equal.\textsuperscript{11} Furthermore, Connelly argues that British sensitivity to Hollywood war films can be viewed in the context of Britain’s declining world role after 1945, the films arouse so much criticism because they dispel the myth that Britain did it alone.\textsuperscript{12}

However, if we examine a separate extract from the same participants as in the previous example but on this occasion discussing a British film a curious contrast occurs:

SS. \textit{Reach for the Sky}, that's an awesome film.
DJ. That's a very British film about, a very British film of that experience of him, a personal experience, you don't really see/
TM. Douglas Bader.
SS. Douglas Bader, #that was it.
DJ. That's his name, thank you yeah.
SS. Lost it, got tin legs, got shot down and he was in a concentration camp and they flew over some new legs for him, then he escaped and started flying again and got shot down again, and then they didn't send him the second pair of legs because they were like [in German accent] "you’ll just escape".\textsuperscript{13}

Here, the 1956 film \textit{Reach for the Sky}, which depicted the true story of Douglas Bader who overcame losing his legs to once more fly Spitfires for the RAF, is described by Scott as ‘an awesome film’ and by Dawn as representing a ‘personal experience’ rather than suggesting that this film may have drawn on any poetic license. Furthermore, as Scott describes what happens in the movie he is doing so in a way that does not dispute the factual content on the film. Yet not only did British documentary films during the war tend to focus only upon the British war record, but, as Chapman comments, the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] GD, TG, GB, TM, 23.6.09, lines 665-674.
\end{footnotes}
'filmic representation of the British war effort remained focussed on the national experience. This insularity was to become even more apparent in post-war films about the Second World War, which marginalised the role of Britain’s allies even further.'\textsuperscript{14}

However, for Scott and Dawn this British film has none of the inaccuracies that they highlight in American representations, and they do not suggest here that Britain’s other allies should have a greater representation in the movie. It is perhaps indicative of how little the interviewees wished to imply a reliance upon the Americans that only a small minority suggested that Britain needed them to help win the war at all. This was only mentioned in seven examples over four interviews and four of these examples were from one interview with a third generation participant.

**Marginalisation of Russian War Effort**

Conversely, when discussing Britain’s other main ally, the Russians, the participants have very little to say regarding their memories or knowledge of the USSR. This can obviously be accounted for in some ways because whereas hundreds of thousands of American troops were stationed in Britain during the war, and thus for many people personal contact was unavoidable, this was not the case with ordinary Russian soldiers. However, as we will see the comparative level of remembrance compared to other high profile public occasions and support for the USSR is very low and we can discuss some reasons for this. Of the fifteen examples from fourteen interviews where Russia was discussed the particular comments mentioned were just to express that the interviewee did not know anything about them or the Eastern Front. For instance the interviewer (TM) asks first generation member Frieda Reid (FR) about her memory of the Russians:

TM. Do you remember hearing much about the Eastern Front? The Russians/ war with Germany and the Russians?
FR. No.
TM. No you didn’t really hear a lot about that. Nothing in the press or anything like that?
FR. No.\(^{15}\)

There is not much to evaluate about this extract other than it is a typical response that would suggest that Russia was not an important ally to the British people during World War II because of the complete lack of any memory or comment at all on their participation. However, this would be an untrue representation of British attitudes towards Russia during the Second World War. In a Gallup poll from July 1942 about the popularity of Britain’s allies 62 per cent said they preferred Russia compared to only 24 per cent for the USA.\(^{16}\) Indeed, during the war the British media praised the Soviet regime and were prone to calling Stalin ‘good old Uncle Joe’.\(^{17}\) Furthermore, Sunday 7 November 1943 was officially celebrated throughout Britain as ‘Soviet National Day’ and in April 1944 the BBC was still averaging a program a day devoted to the Russian war effort.\(^{18}\) A Mass Observation report from January 1942 even stated that ‘There is a tremendous feeling of admiration and gratitude to Russia revealed throughout this investigation. Many people feel that Russia is doing the best job in the war so far, and some go so far to say she is winning the war for us.’\(^{19}\) Yet not only are instances such as these not mentioned by any of the interviewees, there are virtually no positive comments concerning the Russian war effort at all.

So why is there so little to say about Russia if during World War II they were at least considered an ally of equal stature to America and even thought of more fondly by

\(^{15}\) FG Frieda Reid, GB, TM, 20.2.09, lines 359-364.
\(^{17}\) Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p.213.
\(^{18}\) Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, p.171.
some sections of the British population? Connelly contends that because of the Cold War the British working class admiration for the USSR was quickly replaced by that of the ‘special relationship’ with the USA.\footnote{Connelly, \textit{We Can Take It!}, p.168.} Certainly the onset of the Cold War made it difficult to maintain positive feelings towards Russia, and many of the state sponsored Russian cultural events mentioned above were not longer politically expedient. Therefore in a Gallup poll as early as September 1946 when asked about their feelings towards Russia 41 per cent said their feelings were less friendly than a year before, although 41 per cent replied that their feelings hadn’t changed only 8 per cent said they felt more friendly towards the USSR.\footnote{Gallup (ed), \textit{Gallup International Public Opinion Polls Volume I}, p.139.} In popular culture also there was less inclination to use the Eastern Front to represent the heroics of the Red Army. As Chapman has written it is significant that no British war film of the 1950s focussed on the role of the USSR.\footnote{Chapman, ‘War, Cinema and Society’, p.179.} This is perhaps not only confined to British representations of the war as Jensen, in his study using oral history interviews in Germany, notes the difference between how the Americans and Russians are described and gives the example from one of his interviewees to whom it seems obvious that ‘the Russian soldiers are the “bad guys” whilst the US soldiers are the “good guys”’.\footnote{O. Jensen, ‘ “One goes left to the Russians, the other goes right to the Americans”’- Family Recollections of the Holocaust in Europe’, in M. Davies, and C. Szejnmann (eds), \textit{How the Holocaust Looks Now: International Perspectives}, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.22.} Thus the effect of forty five years of the Cold War has been to relegate the role of the Russian war effort in the political and cultural lives of the Western Allies. In the interviewees responses this leads to an almost complete dearth of information about Russians and the USSR in popular memory and representation. Once more we should note that the interview material was analysed after consultation with a wide variety of reading including the opinions expressed above. However, although we cannot ignore that this may have
influenced the research and analysis process, the fact does remain that the participants do not have a lot at all to say about Russia and so do happen to support the conclusions of the work already done in this area.

However, the oral interview can provide us with extra nuances from peoples’ perceptions that surveys of other sources do not always present. It is not just a lack of knowledge about Russia but in nine examples from nine interviews the participants’ narratives actually downplayed the ability of the Russian Army on the Eastern Front to a significant extent. First generation witness Paul Clark stated that:

The Eastern front was thousands of miles long now you’ve got to supply all these troops with all this equipment and they were a good attacking force the Germans were and in no time at all they were near the gates of Moscow but their supply lines were stretched that far they couldn’t keep up with their troops, and this is probably why; the big reason why it failed. And the Russian winters were minus 30, cold, cold winter and the German troops had summer battledress on and all that; they weren’t equipped for it.24

Here Paul is discussing the German advance in 1941 and mentions the fact that it stalled because of the length of supply lines and that German troops were not prepared for the cold weather. Paul’s daughter Sara also remarked that ‘the Russians were just massacred weren’t they on the German advance, and then the winter came and payback, they were massacred by the weather and also by the troops.’25 Sara also repeats the idea that the winter was responsible for the German Army’s change in fortune and that it allowed the Russians to gain the upper hand. It is not clear whether Sara is adopting the opinion of her father or whether they have both been influenced by external information, such as a television documentary they may have watched together. However, the participant’s evaluation of events ultimately has some accuracy in that the Russian winter and elongated supply lines did hamper the German offensive. Yet rather than focus upon the sacrifice and bravery of Russian soldiers or the effective use of the

24 FG Paul Clark, GB, TM, 25.1.09, lines 267-272.
25 SG Sara Clark, GB, TM, 25.2.09, lines 260-261.
T-34 tank later in the conflict the focus is narrow and concentrates on factors the Russians themselves had no control over. This gives the impression that Russian victory on the Eastern Front was more a matter of good fortune rather than an admission of any skill on behalf of the Red Army or its commanders.

Furthermore only a small number of interviewees, seven examples from four interviews, showed empathy for Russian suffering and hardships during World War II. Discussing Holocaust Memorial Day Bloxham argues that the murdered Russian civilians and POWs are omitted from the remembrance because of a ‘reluctance to recognise that Russian blood and resilience- if also American money- were the decisive factors in defeating Hitler, not the Battle of Britain and “Dunkirk Spirit”’ and he points to the relatively small number of black people persecuted who are held up in much greater significance than the 300,000 Soviet POWs who died. Indeed, the lack of focus upon the suffering of the Russian nation in England is noticeable in the interviews. Also if we recall our discussion about picture one in the previous chapter none of the participants from the group interviews suggested that it could be a Russian POW, which it was, preferring instead the more iconic Holocaust imagery.

Summary

We have seen here the contrast with which the interviewees discussed Britain’s two main allies during the Second World War. The participants had much more to comment about Americans than they did the Russian war effort and whereas discussions about the Americans contained both positive and negative views in broadly equal measure the opinion of the Russians was largely negative. This can attributed to the Cold War and thus the lack of a positive image of the Russian people and the Red

Army post-1945 in Britain. The Americans were thought of as friendly by some and arrogant by others and this seemed to be determined on the individual experience of each first generation participant with GIs. Although there was a tendency for those participants who had positive memories of Americans also to balance their personal memories with an acknowledgement that not all people embraced the American servicemen who were ‘over here’. Furthermore, there is a particular uneasiness with the feeling that any of Britain’s allies, but especially America, should represent their own role in World War II to an extent that Britain’s responsibility for victory was anything less than equal to the other major allies; this is especially applicable to filmic accounts of the period.
As mentioned in the previous chapter when we state that we are looking at Britain’s enemies, or the Axis Powers, in this chapter, we are actually discussing only the nations that were highlighted often enough to begin to analyse a collective discourse, Germany and Japan. Even the Italians were infrequently mentioned despite the British fighting them in North Africa and liberating Italy itself. However, there are some interesting narratives from the interviewees concerning memories of Germans and Japanese and also how these nations are represented now. This chapter will begin by examining the positive ways that Germans are generally viewed by the participants. This includes emphasising the similarities between the British and Germans, surveying some narratives about contact British people had with German POWs, and comments about the German situation post-World War I and Erwin Rommel. We can then contrast this with the largely negative comments that inform the participants’ perception of the Japanese. This stems from the treatment of British POWs in the Far East. However, it also leads to a discussion on the level of understanding there was for British POWs of the Japanese after the war because of the secondary nature of that theatre of war within British war memory. Finally, we will look at how the dropping of nuclear weapons on Japan is viewed in relation to these other issues.

Germans Viewed Positively

If we begin by looking at how the Germans are viewed we should mention the current literature that highlights how during and immediately after World War II British attitudes can be broadly characterised as conciliatory towards Germany. Cesarani points out that by the time of the war crime trials of senior German generals like von Manstein
in 1948-49 there was a popular reaction against ‘dragging out’ the process of retribution and Churchill actually subscribed to von Manstein’s defence fund.¹ Cesarani further argues that the British felt they were persecuting people whose only crime was to be on the losing side and in doing so they were alienating their new ally, West Germany, whom they needed to be against their new Cold War enemy, the USSR.² Fox has pointed out that even during the war in the British Institute of Public Opinion (BIPO) polls in 1939 only 6 per cent held the German people responsible, this peaked at 50 per cent after the Blitz and the MoI ‘anger campaign’ in 1940 but had dropped to 41 per cent again by April 1943 with the majority again blaming the Nazi government.³ Therefore even during the war years it should be noted that a significant proportion of the British population was always predisposed to accepting mitigating circumstances towards their judgement upon the German people.

The role of the secondary material in highlighting a positive view of Germans in the analysis should be borne in mind. However, within this positive view of Germans we can identify in the interviews more specific trends and nuances of collective thought emerged. For instance there was the belief not to appropriate blame or victimise the German people for what had happened during World War II. This was recorded in eighteen examples from eighteen interviews with an even balance across the generations that included six examples from the first generation, six examples from the second generation and five examples from the third generation with one example from a family interview that had no discernable generational leader to the conversation. In the extract below from a family interview first generation member Mary Pole (MP) leads

³ J. Fox, Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany. World War II Cinema, (Oxford, 2007), p.139.
the family discussion with her daughter Ann Pole (AP) about a German woman who married a British man and worked for the same company she did after the war:

MP. It's like that/ do you remember the woman who came to work for us who married a British soldier, I mean there was Sophie and Francis, they were Polish, and when/ I forget the German’s name, call her Marie for the want of a name. We had to go and sit at tables, we weren't allowed to eat on the station because the work and the grease that we were doing. And they totally ignored her and she was upset, anyway she came and sat at our table, and the conversation got around to the war, I don't know how it must have done somehow, but she was saying that there was just as much anguish/

AP. That's right.

MP. In the German side because they lost a son, a house, they were bombed and goodness knows what, as it was in Coventry, like your granddad getting killed.4

Mary’s narrative here is focussed upon how upset the German girl became when the Polish girls would not talk to her. There is no attempt to offer any explanation or even empathy concerning why the Polish girls reacted this way, therefore the result of focussing upon the German girl’s upset conversely highlights the unreasonableness of the Polish girls in the narrative. Furthermore, Mary’s lack of empathy for Polish suffering is superseded by an attempt to emphasise the fact that Germans also suffered. Her daughter Ann, agrees with this point and Mary even likens what happened to her own experiences in Coventry, and their family experience of Ann’s grandfather losing his life, and highlights that the German people would have lost loved ones as Ann did when her grandfather was killed. There seems to be a clear message from this extract that Mary could not, and Ann agrees with her, understand the need to react hatefully towards the Germans and assimilates the experience of the ordinary German as being akin to the British experience. At the end of the war the weeks that followed, press reports of the Holocaust continued to place the Jewish fate in with other groups and also encouraged the British people not to blame or hate the German people.5 Bower notes

4 FD Pole/ Rye, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 436-445.
5 Cesarani, ‘Great Britain’, p.611.
that during the 1980s, when claims were made that former war criminals were living in Britain, the same phrases from MPs and peers of ‘emotions of hatred and revenge’, ‘obeying superiors’ orders’, and ‘show trials’ that were heard forty years earlier were used all over again.\textsuperscript{6} Thus this idea can be traced from the end of the Second World War throughout official British attitudes as how to treat the German people, but is also significantly present in the narratives of the participants.

As well as not being overly critical of Germans during the war, first generation witness Nancy Walker (NW) actually described an occasion to the interviewer (TM) where she had an extremely positive interaction with a German fighter pilot during the war:

NW… there was a dogfight going on and I was with two boys that I used to play with, two friends, and we were pretending to shoot at these planes with sticks, kids of 12 wouldn't do that now but we/ you know. The German plane came down and went along a field but he was very low and we could see him and/ bearing in mind he had guns all round, all he'd got to do was press a button and we'd have been shot, you understand, as the plane went by we could see him quite clearly, he came very low to/ and then up again and away. And as he went by, we were standing there pretending to shoot at him, and as he went by he went [interviewee salutes].

TM. Saluted you.

NW. Yeah, he could have shot us, yeah. And I've always remembered that incident that whoever he was he could have shot the three of us, but he didn't, he was/ he could see the/ whoever he was he must have seen the funny side of us standing there doing this [mimes shooting action] [laughter].\textsuperscript{7}

Rather than being a terrifying experience, as Nancy said they could have been shot, this incident is remembered as an almost chivalric occasion where the good Knight of the air takes time out, whilst over enemy territory, to swoop low and acknowledge the three children pretending to shoot him with a friendly salute in their direction. Nancy’s narrative indicates a mutual respect between the British and German people that still found a way to embody itself even in the midst of warfare.


\textsuperscript{7} FG Nancy Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 183-196.
This idea of mutual respect manifests itself further in the next theme about the Germans from the interviews— the recurring suggestion that the participants emphasised how the German people were just like the British people. This is linked to our discussion in the Holocaust chapter about the distinction emphasised by many between Nazis and ordinary Germans. However, this takes the idea a step further and highlights areas from the ordinary German character that aligns itself with British traits. This section accounts for fifteen examples from twelve interviews and again is split very evenly over the three generations. Third generation member Dominic Rye (DR) noted to the interviewer (TM) a story he knew of German POWs rebuilding a local church:

DR. Well, I think it's a marvellous gesture to rebuild the church, and one of them was obviously an expert carver because it's full of ornate carvings all over the place. I think that would have been/
TM. Not swastikas! [laughter]
DR. Not swastikas no, things like Jesus preaching from the thing and being baptised by John the Baptist. I think that was/ I think that would have worked wonders just on a small scale, just sort of saying that these people are people too and they feel the same, they have the same religion as us, I think that would have been a big eye-opener.

Dominic knows this story from visiting a local Church and believes it to be a ‘marvellous gesture’ that it was rebuilt, though we do not know whether the POWs intended it as a gesture or whether they were required to do it by British authorities. Nevertheless Dominic notes the impressive carvings within the Church which would suggest that the Germans did a good job of their rebuilding task. However, he uses this event to emphasise the common religious bond between Britain and Germany and by calling it a ‘big eye-opener’ Dominic states that this was a factor in post-war reconciliation and in Britain recognising their similarities to the German people. Lawson has also shown how, both during and after the war, the Anglican Church in Britain was promoting a policy to their Christian members that Germans should be

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8 TG Dominic Rye, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 202-210.
brought back into the international community and Germans themselves were victims of Nazism.\textsuperscript{9} Indeed, the Anglican Church tried to promote an empathy with German suffering during the war and to emphasise German victimisation alongside Nazi guilt.

Furthermore, in a third generation group interview 30 year-old Engineer graduate Charlie Collins also noted that:

CC. And it's the same with us that there was a decision made that we were going to go to war against Germany and obviously the people at the top made that decision for the rest of the nation so all of our Armed Forces had to go in and do that, and to do their duty so to speak. And there was a lot of Germans doing what was considered their duty, is just perspective isn't it. If you/ from a German point of view they were doing what they were being asked to do by their government and their leaders, we were doing the same.\textsuperscript{10}

Again this type of narrative links back to the conclusions we drew in chapter five on the Holocaust where the effect of propaganda and coercion was perceived by the participants to mitigate and limit the responsibility of ordinary Germans for their actions during the war period. However, in the above extract Charlie uses the example of having to follow orders to draw similarities to the British and German war experience. Once more the effect of his testimony is to underline how the German people were not much different from the British people and separate them from the Nazis, who were Britain’s real enemy. This was a factor in British cinema from 1945 onwards and Chapman shows that British films of the 1950s such as \textit{The Battle of River Plate} (1956), \textit{The One That Got Away} (1957), and \textit{Ice Cold in Alex} (1958) show a human side to the Germans that contrasts directly with the ‘fanatical Nazi’ depiction.\textsuperscript{11}

During the war years English people encountered Germans as POWs based in the country. This was mentioned in twenty one examples over eighteen interviews and


\textsuperscript{10} GD, TG, GB, TM, 23.6.09, lines 404-410.

here the majority of the examples were from the first generation but there were five examples from the second generation and two examples from the third generation. That it was prominent in the first generation but not so much in the later generations could be as a result of the interview process. Meeting or seeing Prisoners of War was brought up by the interviewer as a prompt when discussing Britain’s enemies which led to some of the first generation discussing doing so. The fact that it is then accounted for infrequently in the subsequent generations would appear to be because, although some of the first generation do discuss it when prompted, it is not something they have ever mentioned within the family setting. Virtually all of the examples in this section deal with instances where the memory of seeing or meeting German POWs left a positive impression of them, only one interviewee commented negatively about feeling afraid of German POWs. In the example below from the Slater/ Davison family discussion first generation Evelyn Slater (ES) has been asked to recall seeing German POWs to her daughter Mandy Davison (MD) by the interviewer because she did not know about this experience from her mother:

ES. They used to work on the farms, but they were watched by, you know/
MD. Guards.
ES. Like people.
MD. Were they armed, the guards?
ES. No, no. The farmers and that like, you know, they'd work in groups, they used to work/ and they used to bring them on trucks, on like army trucks.
MD. So how did you feel then about/ so where did they keep them, did they keep them in camps?
ES. They were kept on certain farms.
MD. Where did they live though?
ES. They lived on the farms, probably in barns and things like that, you know, they didn't live in the house. They were kept on/ and I don't know whether they were like army barracks type of thing and then they were transported onto the farmers to help with the harvests and picking things like that, you know, during the war.12

12 FD Slater/ Davison, GB, TM, 25.8.08, lines 309-322.
What we can draw from this example is the underlying emphasis on mutual respect and almost camaraderie that Evelyn is commenting upon compared to the attempts by Mandy to ascertain how the Germans were guarded and treated as the enemy. Mandy asks questions concerning how the Germans were guarded and if they were locked away in camps. Evelyn responds that it was only the farmers who guarded them and rather than live in camps they had a rather more idyllic lifestyle living in barns by night and helping with the harvest during the day. Rather than highlighting the Germans as the captured enemy this has the effect of suggesting that they were free and did not wish to escape. There is no mention in her memory, and thus not relayed to her family, of the many actual prison camps in the UK, this more tranquil view of working farms and living on the land is promoted. It is almost as if these captured Germans were a part of the British war effort during the war, and they are certainly not characterised as Nazis.

First generation witness Nancy Walker (NW) also recalled conversing with German POWs to the interviewer (TM) after the war:

NW… over the years as they were there we got to know them and when they were allowed to fraternise they spoke and when they were allowed to go back home they give a party for us, I told you, and they also gave all of us a gift. Everyone in the Avenue where I lived, we all had a gift that they'd made [mobile text alert goes off in background] and/ so I had a small wooden jewel case that they gave me and I've still got it. It's on my bedside table and I've still got my gift, but they gave all of us a gift and/ when the evening finished all the camp, all the German Prisoners of War got together and sung to us ‘It’s a Long Way to Tipperary’ in a German accent. Yes, I'm all right with the Germans, yeah. And after the war the Chancellor of Germany went down on his knees and begged forgiveness, you've heard about that?

TM. I hadn't actually, no.
NW. One of the Chancellors, it was quite a few years after the war, and he went down on his knees at some occasion and begged forgiveness for their sins, he said we did wrong and we didn't realise. And that's okay with me.\textsuperscript{13}

Nancy’s narrative differs from Evelyn’s because of the much more intense personal contact she can remember having with the German POWs. The narrative is

\textsuperscript{13} FD Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 246-260.
overwhelmingly positive and Nancy even confesses she still has the gift given to her indicating that it was well received and of significant sentimental value to her. However, she uses this personal contact and the act of reconciliation she experienced as a device for a comment upon all Germans. It seems likely Nancy is referencing Chancellor Brandt kneeling down at a monument for the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in Warsaw in 1970. At this occasion Brant silently knelt in front of a memorial that was specific to a certain occasion, the ghetto uprising, within the context of the Holocaust. Yet Nancy appears to have universalised this for all wrongdoing by the Germans during the war and, furthermore, whilst this was clearly a reflective and humble moment, she interprets Brandt’s silent vigil as an act of ‘begging forgiveness’. This gives connotations of a great desire to admit all past discretions and to be absolved. Nancy is quite adamant that this public example of remorse makes her ‘all right with Germans’ and there is no animosity on her behalf.

One German in particular is held in high esteem amongst a significant minority of the interviewees. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel is mentioned thirteen times in ten interviews, all being positive remarks apart from one comment from Jewish interviewee Rebecca Solomon who noted that she could not remember a lot about him but that he ‘was a bad German I suppose’. However, the extract below, where second generation Anne Pole (AP) discussed Rommel with the interviewer (TM), is more typical of the responses concerning the Field Marshal:

AP. Only from watching sort of James Mason in the Rommel films and things. Because that was another thing wasn’t it, when I was a child, every Sunday afternoon had a war film on. So I think my opinions have probably been well coloured by that.
TM. Well, what is your opinions of Rommel and the desert war?
AP. Well, he was always presented as a bit of a gentleman wasn’t he, because he was against the Nazi party, wasn’t he one of the old-style aristocracy?
TM. Yeah.

14 FD, Rebecca Solomon, GB, TM, 23.8.08, line 586.
AP. And was considered to be quite a decent chap because he/ well they gave
him a cut glass accent didn't they, so he'd got to be a goodie. [TM laughs] Speaking in a very stylised German accent I think that would have marked him
out as a baddie. That's probably the only opinion I've got about him, other than
he's/ he's you know, would have been a good cricketer, he played by the rules
didn't he, he was a decent sort.

TM. And you think you got that opinion from these films?
AP. I'm sure it's James Mason [laughs].

Anne mentions ideas that were prevalent in the other narratives concerning Rommel’s
perceived fairness and the point that he was not a Nazi. This idea that the battles in
World War II where the allies were fighting Rommel were somehow more chivalric and
altogether decent occasions is paramount. However, Anne’s narrative is important
because she also indicates that she believes her opinions were formed by The Desert
Fox: The Story of Rommel (1951) starring James Mason because this is what she can
remember watching on Sunday afternoons as a child. The film itself was based on the
book Rommel (1950) by Desmond Young that went on to sell 300,000 copies in Britain
and the USA and ‘helped make Rommel the best enemy commander of the war’. The
book itself rather eulogises over Rommel’s abilities as a soldier and a man and includes
a foreword by Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, British Commander in Chief of
the Middle East theatre 1941-42. Auchinleck highlights Rommel’s ‘resilience,
resourcefulness and mental agility’ and admits that he could not ‘translate my deep
detestation of the regime for which he fought into personal hatred of him as an
opponent’. Thus, Rommel’s reputation as a good and noble German was cemented in
popular consciousness through his representation in books and films during the 1950s.
However, it is interesting that of the thirteen examples from interviews in this section
not one is from the third generation. This would indicate that whilst a positive view of
Rommel in the media aided his public reception from the 1950s, this is not being

15 SG, Ann Pole, GB, TM, 7.9.08, lines 258-272.
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,818519,00.html
sustained by more contemporary representation and this is having the effect that later generations are not aware of his exploits during the Second World War.

There were some participants, six examples from five interviews, who did admit to hating Germans during the war, though their opinions have since changed. First generation Evelyn Slater, who we mentioned earlier in relation to her feelings on German POWs, was one such participant. She commented that ‘I hated them, I really did. I won't say I hate them now, because it's not… it's their forefathers and such like, you know. And I think they look at it differently now, same as we do.’\textsuperscript{18} Evelyn is not usual in her candid response about having hated Germans at one point even though she feels differently now. However, this changing of feeling towards the Germans occurred very quickly after the end of World War II. A Gallup poll conducted twenty months after the end of the war in January 1947 showed 42 per cent of respondents felt friendly towards the German people compared to 36 percent who said they felt unfriendly and 22 per cent with no opinion.\textsuperscript{19} Whilst there is still a significant number here reporting feeling ‘unfriendly’ we can see how even in 1947 they are fewer than those who report ‘friendly’ feelings. This is something that Donnelly highlights in his work and he writes ‘Memories of Belsen and further revelations about German atrocities brought out at the war crimes trials seem to have diminished in power within two years of the war’s end. As the Cold War set in and relations with the USSR worsened, so attitudes towards Germany became more favourable.’\textsuperscript{20}

Once more media representations also played an integral part in shaping attitudes. An important film came out in 1947 called Frieda that helped to change the attitude of the British people to how they viewed the German people. The main

\textsuperscript{18} FG Evelyn Slater, GB, TM, 25.8.08, lines 323-325.
\textsuperscript{20} M. Donelly, ‘The Holocaust and post-war historical master-narratives of Britain’s “good war”’, Unpublished, p.6.
character, Frieda, a German nurse, helped a British pilot to escape and returned with him to England. There she faces a suspicious community but the audience is won over by her kindness. In a scene in the film Frieda is seen watching the pictures of Belsen with Bob, the pilot whom she saved, and is upset whilst crying that it was done by ‘my people’. Later her brother, a fanatical Nazi arrives in England and tries to persuade Frieda that all Germans are the same but Frieda is seen to reject this idea that all Germans are one, bound by blood. By the end of the film, in what appears to be a metaphor of how all Germany should be treated, the attitude of the locals softens towards Frieda and she becomes a part of the community. Lovell calls Frieda ‘almost a public service film and, partly because its political message was so overt, it was given a cool critical reception’ however, more importantly it became ‘a box office success’.21 For balance, it should be noted that all the participants did not share a positive view of the Germans. However, it was only a small number of instances where this was recorded, seven examples from five interviews, and even within this section I should point out that five of these seven examples are from interviews involving the Dyet/Wright family. Although the analysis was approached considering the secondary material that emphasised the rehabilitation of the German people, overwhelmingly the responses about Germans in the narratives were in line with this theme.

Japanese Viewed Negatively

The other significant adversary of the British that was mentioned frequently was the Japanese. The comments centred on the human rights abuses carried out by the Japanese, and highlighted in twenty six examples from eighteen interviews was their treatment of British POWs. The amount of comments from each generation is heavily

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biased towards the first generation with eighteen of the twenty six examples coming from them. Furthermore, sixteen of those eighteen first generation examples were from female participants. Once more this would indicate that specific stories or opinions about Britain’s enemies are not necessarily spoken about within the family. This would reemphasise what we have already seen of family memories that what tends to be discussed is instances specifically related to the first generation’s experiences. These are mentioned at appropriate times in conversation and appear as ‘snippets’ of the family’s past, rather than long, overarching war stories covering all areas. First generation member Nancy Walker commented about the treatment of British POWs by the Japanese that ‘all they had, each day they had a bowl of rice, and that's all they had to eat all day a bowl of rice, which is just barely enough apparently to keep you alive. And they're drinking water/ and the Japanese guards, excuse what I'm going to say, they used to pee in their water.’\textsuperscript{22} Nancy had earlier mentioned in her interview that she knew about the treatment of British POWs of the Japanese because of her personal contact with survivors of the POW camps who had returned to Britain after the war. This was the same with first generation member Keith Miller (KM) who explained to the interviewer (TM) about a friend’s treatment as a POW of the Japanese:

KM. Yeah, I used to work with the chap who was a prisoner of war in Japan, but/ he used to get beat quite a lot with bamboo sticks.
TM. How do you feel towards/ or how did he feel towards the Japanese.
KM. He didn't like them at all, but I think that was only through what they went through, they didn't get a lot to eat and they used to beat them with bamboo if they weren't doing what they should have been doing, or weren’t doing it fast enough.\textsuperscript{23}

We discussed in chapter five how the first generation were not able to elaborate very much on the extent of the suffering of victims of the Holocaust. However, as we can see through Nancy’s and Keith’s extracts their personal contact with someone who

\textsuperscript{22} FG Nancy Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 406-409.
\textsuperscript{23} FG Keith Miller, GB, TM, 26.2.09, lines 129-134.
experienced suffering in Japanese POW camps has led to a more in-depth knowledge and sympathy to their situation. They both give specific examples of how people suffered and this information is shocking and is used to highlight the extent of the harsh treatment.

Although only three examples were recorded here from the third generation Scott Simmonds (SS) did comment in a third generation group interview:

SS. From what I've seen documentary wise, the British and American POWs were horrifically treated, I mean they would have many hundred mile forced marches just from camp to camp through jungle and if you didn't make it you died where you laid, if you didn't keep pace you would be beaten and then you would probably die anyway. They had no medical supplies, most of them died of dysentery and then they would have occasional just kills, you know the soldiers/ the Japanese soldiers would be prone to just going I don't like you, I'm going to kill you for no reason other than the fact that they were just very very nasty people.

Although this is not passed directly to Scott from a first generation witness he knew, it is similar in its gruesome and vivid description of what some British POWs had to endure. At the end of this extract Scott comments that the soldiers who killed British POWs were just ‘very nasty people’. This is unusual as most of the heavily negative attitudes are displayed in the first generation with the second and third generations less critical. Indeed Scott goes further to comment about the Japanese that ‘Yeah but they were far more brutal than the Germans were. I mean you just look at, British POWs in Europe were kept in concentration camps yeah but they were fairly humane, especially compared to the Japanese concentration camps where you were basically abandoned in the middle of the jungle with nothing. And you were very lucky/ I can't remember what the survival rate was for those/ for the Eastern POW camps that it wasn't very high, a lot of people died there, yeah just horrible.’

Scott may just be commenting about the treatment of POWs in concentration camps (although the vast majority of POWs were

24 GD, TG, GB, TM, 23.6.09, lines 733-740.
25 Ibid., 742-747.
never sent to concentration camps reserved for Jews and political prisoners) but he does make a clear distinction here between the relative humanity of Germans during the war to the Japanese that appears to omit completely the German human rights abuses because he classes the Japanese as ‘far more brutal’. It appears what Scott has seen in the documentary he watched has influenced his opinion greatly. This is not surprising if what he saw was as horrific as he mentioned but it is important to remember the mitigating circumstances that participants gave to German perpetrators of the Holocaust, mentioned in chapter five, that is conspicuous by its absence here towards the Japanese.

How participants who mentioned Japanese treatment of British POWs responded with their feelings towards the Japanese people is interesting. A clear emotional response towards the Japanese was recorded in twenty five examples from fifteen interviews, once more this was heavily weighted towards the first generation with fifteen of the examples. Also, as was briefly mentioned above the more negative reactions tended to come from the first generation whilst the second and third generations were more conciliatory in their responses. The example below from the Walker family interview where first generation Nancy Walker (NW), second generation Lara Walker (LW) and third generation Chelsea Walker (CW) are discussing the Japanese demonstrates this effectively:

NW. My feelings the Japanese are so strong because of how they treated people, that physical and mental torture, and my feelings are so strong that there was an occasion when I was in hospital and a nurse was sent to give me an injection and she was a Japanese, and asked her first if she was a Japanese, yes she was, and I said well then you are not touching me. I said I will no't allow you as a Japanese near me, and I wouldn't have it/ they had to fetch another nurse, that's how strong my feeling is to them. And I still feel the same because I know some of the/ I knew the people concerned and I knew some of the terrible things they did to people, which were quite inhuman.
LW. But I think as it comes down the generation, I understand/
CW. [quieter] I've got friends that are Japanese.
LW. But it wouldn't bother me so much/
NW. But you see I actually knew the people/
LW. Exactly yeah.
NW. That were affected the rest of their #lives.
CW. It's not their grandkids and that #did it.\textsuperscript{26}

Just before this extract in the family interview the Walker family had been discussing how Nancy liked to watch the film \textit{The Bridge Over the River Kwai} and would encourage other family members to do so. The film became an opportunity for Nancy to elaborate about her feelings towards the Japanese with her family.\textsuperscript{27} Nancy’s opinions of the Japanese are not just feelings towards what some of their armed forces did during the war but has resonated with her throughout her life, to the point where she refused treatment from a Japanese nurse. She justifies this stance through the British people she knew who were affected by their wartime experiences and contact with the Japanese. However, this hatred is not present in her daughter or granddaughter. Lara comments that does not ‘bother’ her and Chelsea even mentions that she has Japanese friends and suggests that the grandchildren of those involved should not be blamed. Whilst this last comment of Chelsea’s could be described as a challenge to Nancy’s opinions overall in this extract, and throughout the rest of the interview, Lara and Chelsea do not ever tell Nancy that they believe her opinions to be outright wrong and she should alter them. This is implied at some points, such as in the above extract, but it is often accompanied by an attempt to understand and accept Nancy’s views as something that is pertinent to her because of her experiences talking to friends who returned from Japanese POW camps. Even in the above extract Lara begins to comment ‘I understand’ before getting interrupted and when Nancy highlights that she knew the people involved Lara responds ‘Exactly yeah’, accepting this as the reasons for her mother’s opinions without actually having to agree with them herself.

\textsuperscript{26} FD Walker, GB, TM, 8.5.08, lines 93-108.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid.}, 72-91.
The language and comparisons between the Japanese and Germans as adversaries is also interesting in some of the narratives. First generation witness Maureen Nicholls described the reasons for the inhumane treatment of British POWs ‘because the Japanese they were very.. they were cruel you know, instead of fighting a war they were, they were cruel you know.’ She then continued to comment that ‘I don't think the people were so against the Germans as they were against the Japanese, I mean it was/ we understood it weren’t the German people, I mean they were no different to us, I mean they probably thought the same about us as we thought about them’ Thus she offers an opinion that the Japanese were inherently cruel and suggests, similar to Scott’s extract earlier, that the German people were somehow nobler and not hated as much as the Japanese. There is some evidence for these claims as even during the war Mass Observation reports indicated that there was negative stereotyping of the whole Japanese nation not on a par with how the Germans were perceived. In the aftermath of Pearl Harbour a report from December 1941 suggested the public thought of the Japanese as ‘fanatical and “different”’ and of a ‘picture of yellow fanaticism’ that ‘leads to an irrational fear of Japan’. A further report from August 1943 comments that the public see the Japanese as ‘inhuman’ and ‘devilish’ but this is not just from the war, they are also influenced by ‘cheap literature in general where they [the Japanese] are rarely depicted in a pleasant way, they have all the frightening propensity of the unknown.’ Thus the ‘difference’ of the Japanese in the public’s perceptions should be seen in terms of their racial difference to Europeans that becomes extenuated by the

28 FG Maureen Nicholls, GB, TM, 18.6.08, lines 215-216.
29 Ibid., 242-245.
lack of contact the vast majority in Britain had with peoples from the Far East and therefore they become a ‘dangerous other’ in peoples’ minds. It is this that conceivably affected people when they began to hear of atrocities in the Far East carried out by the Japanese. A Mass Observation Report from March 1942 commented that upon hearing of Japanese atrocities in Hong Kong a ‘widespread feeling of hatred for the Japanese has grown up suddenly’.\(^{32}\) The report author actually makes a point to contrast this with the feelings for Germany and wrote that ‘there has been remarkably little hatred of anyone in this war within Britain. Feeling in favour of reprisal bombing against Germany, even in the middle of the Blitz in Britain, was not very fierce apart from a minority.’\(^{33}\) Thus illustrating how a lack of knowledge of, and contact with, people from the Far East led to them being categorised along racial grounds with negative stereotypes whereas the German people retained at least some of their individuality as people who were not exclusively fanatical Nazis. A view that is still evident in a portion of the narratives for this study, mainly, but not exclusively limited to, the first generation.

Furthermore, the rehabilitation of the German people compared to the Japanese remained a factor in Britain throughout the post-war years. Paris, like other scholars, points out that representation of Germans in films of the 1950s were ‘mostly honourable’ and the ‘occasional appearance of a Nazi fanatic serves only to underline the essential decency of the majority of Germans; however, he contrasts this with ‘the image of the Japanese [that] was unchanging, and they remained cruel, sadistic and inscrutable- a film image that has proved consistent from the early 1950s.’\(^{34}\) A Gallup poll from December 1967 asked participants to choose words that best described certain


\(^{33}\) Ibid., p.1.

nations national characteristics from a list of verbs provided. Four of the top five German verbs were positive (‘Hardworking’ 35 per cent, ‘Practical’ 15 percent, ‘Intelligent’ 13 per cent, and ‘Progressive’ 12 per cent) with only ‘Arrogant’ joint fourth on 12 per cent being a perceived negative trait. The Japanese top five also included three positive traits (‘Hardworking’ 30 per cent, ‘Progressive’ 18 per cent, and ‘Intelligent’ 13 per cent) but joint third was ‘Cruel’ and fifth was ‘Warlike’ with 13 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. Cruel did feature at ninth on the German list with 5 per cent and at fifth place on the Chinese list with 8 per cent. However, it was at last place on both the French and American lists at 1 per cent (even though this survey was taken during the Vietnam War) and fourteenth on the Russian list with 3 per cent. This poses the question is ‘Cruel’ as a negative stereotype of the Japanese people a remnant left over from the British experience during World War II? Also does ‘Cruel’ feature highly on the Chinese list because of their similar racial characteristics to the Japanese? The second question is harder to answer definitely than the first, however, the evidence from the interviews conducted would support any claims that the Second World War left a lasting impression of the Japanese as cruel people in the minds of some British people that has never been challenged.

British POWs of the Japanese Misunderstood Post-1945

The Far East and Italy are noted as the forgotten campaigns of the Second World War in British memory of the conflict. Concerning the Far East Connelly has argued that one reason for this may have been the fall of Singapore that was a massive shock to British morale and so the region was consciously less emphasised. However,

35 There were twenty-four verbs in total to choose from in this survey. Full results can be found at G. Gallup (ed), *Gallup International Opinion Polls, Volume I*, pp.955-957.
this has had an impact on the way that those who returned from combat duty in the Far East, and particularly British POWs of the Japanese and their families, have been able to represent their memories in Britain. A total of twenty six examples from eleven interviews were recorded where there were accounts of experiences of British POWs of the Japanese being misunderstood upon their return. The Smith/ Wilkinson family members account for a large proportion of these examples with first generation member Jenny Smith accounting for six examples, second generation member Shirley Wilkinson with eight examples and third generation member Steve Wilkinson with three examples. However, this is because Jenny’s husband was a POW of the Japanese and thus the issue is of particular importance for the family.

In her interview Jenny Smith discussed the dislocation from family life that her husband felt when he returned and commented that when he first met his son who had been born whilst he was incarcerated that ‘it was very difficult to begin with because they didn’t really bond. I think you can deal with it when you’re a young baby but they didn’t bond then at the time. And he was very [incomprehensible] and I said to my mother “I don’t think we shall ever hit it off” she said “yes you will, you’ve got to have a lot of patience and understanding”, which, of course, it does gradually come.’ It is interesting that Jenny chose to mention this within the frame of discussing problems upon her husband’s return. This would indicate that she viewed the inability of her husband and son to ‘hit it off’ as symptom of the aftermath of his experiences as a POW of the Japanese. This sense of dislocation is reaffirmed in a conversation second generation member Shirley Wilkinson (SW) had with the interviewer (AL):

SW… well they all came back pretty bad, but, very hard to live with for a long time. I mean I don’t know that because I wasn’t here but I know that did affect

37 Deceased by the time interviews were conducted.
38 FG Jenny Smith, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 115-119.
the family an awful lot. Mum said he wasn’t the same person when he came back.
AL: Experienced quite a lot didn’t he, sort of not very nice stuff at all.
SW: Yeah, it’s not good.
AL: Yeah. Well he wrote his memoirs didn’t he but that was, but that was/
SW: Yes, but he didn’t actually write about his experiences, he only wrote about like where he was born and when he was prisoner and how long he was there for and everything, but no, he didn’t, as I say he never spoke an awful lot.39

Here Shirley repeats the implication that her father’s experiences as a POW of the Japanese seemed to alter him as a person and notes that her mother has explicitly mentioned to her that he ‘wasn’t the same person’. However, Shirley goes on to mention to the interviewer that even when he wrote about what happened her father would only write about basic facts such as dates rather than actual private experiences. Thus there appears to be a certain amount of silence within the family on the subject and a reluctance to discuss the subject by Shirley’s father upon his return.

This is further emphasised by a quote later from Shirley that ‘My dad used to have a friend who used to visit us for the reunions… my mum didn’t want to know about that so she said “don’t talk about that”. But my dad did talk about things like that with the men but never with us.’40 Here she notes that not only did her father not particularly want to discuss situations with his family but her mother actively discouraged any conversation about the subject even when former comrades of her father who had shared experiences visited. This is not just exclusive to the Smith/Wilkinson family and in a second generation group interview Ivy Walsh (IW) and Becky King (BK) discussed two people they knew who had experience as POWs of the Japanese:

IW: We lived next to a bloke who was in a German/ in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, Harry Jones/
BK: I knew somebody from that and he was a director of a car manufacturer and he wouldn’t even speak to the Japs.

39 SG Shirley Wilkinson, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 41-50.
40 Ibid., 156-164.
IW: Harry never spoke, even to his wife, about what had happened in Japanese prisoner of war camp, but every year they had a reunion didn’t they and that was the only time he ever used to talk about it when he got to the reunion, he would talk about it then at the reunion but he never even told his wife what had happened. 41

What Becky’s friend endured has affected his attitude to Japanese people even after the war to the point where his post-war relationship with Japanese people in everyday life is affected, similar to Nancy’s response above. However, Ivy’s comment about her friend not being able to express his experiences except with those who had been there with him is similar to what Shirley Wilkinson noticed about her father. Furthermore, Shirley noted also that ‘mum didn’t like it if he [her father] used to watch war films, because she used to say “oh, blooming war things”. But like me dad used to say “I wasn’t around for that”, he missed the war because he was in it somewhere else! [laughter]’. 42

It is interesting how her father used to like watching films about the Second World War but not so he could see his own experiences being represented in the media but because other areas of the war were being shown that he felt he ‘wasn’t around for’. Furthermore, Shirley uses the words that her father ‘missed the war’ because of being incarcerated in a Japanese POW camp. This phrase leads us to suggest that Shirley felt her father missed the war as it is portrayed most often in popular memory because he was ‘somewhere else’, in this case a POW of the Japanese. Therefore, we can see not only the marginalisation of the Far East campaign in British war memory but the memories and experiences of soldiers based in this theatre as well. They are left in a position where they find vocalising their experiences extremely difficult even to close friends or family.

In this sense I would like to suggest that we can draw some parallels between the post-war experience of British POWs of the Japanese and the immediate post-war

41 GD, SG, GB, TM, 20.7.07, lines 759-766.
42 SG Shirley Wilkinson, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 299-301.
experience of Holocaust survivors. Greater exposure of the Holocaust in public perception from the 1960s onwards led to Jewish survivors being able to discuss the subject. Indeed, there was a period up to the 1960s when any survivors of the Holocaust who were willing to openly tell their story were very rare. However, as Schudson has noted, after the Eichmann trial in 1963 and the Six-Day War in 1967, the Jewish community became more open and the Holocaust became more reflective in the new glories of the Israeli military.\(^\text{43}\) However, this kind of redemption never happened for the British POWs of the Japanese to be able to express how they felt. Indeed, General MacArthur at The Tokyo Trials, the Far Eastern equivalent of Nuremberg, did not pursue the Japanese Emperor for war crimes because he feared alienating the Japanese people at the onset of the Cold War. Dower has commented that ‘with the full support of MacArthur’s headquarters, the prosecution functioned, in effect, as a defence team for the emperor’.\(^\text{44}\) Interestingly, Donnelly also likens the treatment of the British POWs in the Far East in British war memory to that of the Holocaust. He comments that the lack of interest for such topics in the 1950s and 1960s should be seen in the context of the dominant national narrative of Britain’s ‘good war’ and ‘Anything that deviated from this – not only the Holocaust, but also memories of the traumas suffered by British servicemen in the campaigns in Singapore, Malaya and Burma – was marginalised or silenced.’\(^\text{45}\) Furthermore, all of the associations representing former British POWs of the Japanese and campaigning for their rights were created between 1989-1994- after, or right at the end of, the Cold War. The two largest groups the Japanese Labour Camp Survivors Association (JLCSA) was founded in 1989 and the Association of British Civilian Internees- Far East Region was founded in 1994, both

\(^\text{45}\) Donelly, ‘The Holocaust and post-war historical master-narratives’, p.8.
campaign for an apology and compensation from the Japanese and were involved in the *ex gratia* payment of £10,000 by the British government to former detainees in November 2000. As their creation and demands are a recent phenomenon it would seem that in the immediate aftermath of World War II the political and social climate was not conducive to welcoming the grievances of the POWs of the Far East.

One issue that is mentioned only occasionally, but significantly, in participants’ attempts to try to understand the notion of being a POW of the Japanese is the 1957 film *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*. It was mentioned in five examples by five different participants during the interviews, though four of these were from the first generation. For instance first generation member Richard Cox stated that he knew of British POWs of the Japanese only ‘through films like *The Bridge Over the River Kwai* and you know, but I haven't any first-hand knowledge of them.’ As was mentioned this is only a small minority of participants who mentioned this. However, it is important because the film was a huge popular success, being the highest grossing film of 1957 and winning seven Academy Awards. However, the film focuses less on the suffering of the POWs (although this is obviously present) and more upon a successful and daring mission to destroy the bridge and of the character of Colonel Nicholson’s need to build the bridge as a personal triumph. The defiance of the British soldiers, epitomised as they whistle the *Colonel Bogey* tune as they head off to work on the bridge, is also a fact that is emphasised. This further demonstrates how the representation in Britain in the post-war years was not conducive to survivors of the Japanese POW camps being able to openly express their experiences as the popular representation did not act as a vehicle to discuss them. The fact that Japanese POW

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47 FG Richard Cox, GB, TM, 30.1.09, lines 114-115.
camps were not focussed upon is evident in British prisoner of war novels and films of the immediate post war era. Those novels and films that depicted British servicemen in captivity were all based around heroic deeds and escape attempts. They also tended to take place in the European theatre as is evidenced by bestsellers such as *The Wooden Horse* (1949), *The Colditz Story* (1952), and *The Great Escape* (1951). Ramsden has commented that prisoner of war books became a profitable but separate market in their own right, in 1956 Hodder and Stoughton could advertise no fewer than nine examples of ‘living escape literature’. The key to that phrase is ‘escape’, all of the POW books and films dealt with daring escapes, none concentrated upon what the ordinary soldier, and in particular the average POW experience in the Far East, had to endure.

It is interesting that Shirley Wilkinson notes that from her father the ‘things he used to tell me, you know, about how they used to make shoes out of car tyres and things, you know like the old flip flops with the thong there. They used to cut them up, and make things for their feet.’ As we have seen Shirley mentioned how her father only liked to discuss his experiences with his comrades. However, the information above that he does share with his family very much aligns itself with a more popular British memory of the war. Summerfield concluded when looking at women in the Home Guard that they found it so difficult to articulate their memories of the period because their story was not present in any popular or well-known context; in her words ‘culture and memory did not mutually inform each other’. The interviews conducted for this study would seem to suggest a similar situation for British POWs of the Japanese. We discussed in chapter two the idea of the British emphasis on managing with what they had and the creativeness of the people to ‘make-do’ with what was

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49 SG Shirley Wilkinson, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 55-57.
available. The above narrative contains elements of this, of coping without shoes and even using what was available to protect their feet. It is possible Shirley’s father was willing to share this with his daughter because it was a topic that he could ally with the majority in the collective representation of British war experiences.

The participants were asked about their feelings concerning the dropping of the atomic bomb in Japan. Of those who had an opinion the majority, eleven examples over eleven interviews, considered it a morally bad thing to do. First generation Grace Baines argued ‘that was wicked. Because I was/ believe you should kill the people that start the wars, not innocent people. And they were all/ they were the human race of Japan weren’t they. No consequence of the war at all, and they were all killed or maimed and they died afterwards didn’t they, years later through the effect of the atom bomb. Of course it stopped the war, and that was it.’\textsuperscript{51} The concern does seem to be on the innocent people who died as a result of the atomic bomb and the sheer devastation it caused. A further six examples from six interviews considered it a necessary act to end the war. This includes Jenny Smith who does not speak from a vengeful perspective, despite her husband’s experiences, but only comments that ‘then of course they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, and if they hadn’t have done that, well, none of the men would have come back because they couldn’t have lasted another six months.’\textsuperscript{52} Her concern, as with many in this section, was that it was a practical thing to do to end the war. However, it is interesting to note that when the participants discussed British bombing raids on German cities the order is reversed. Thirteen examples from twelve interviews comment about the justification of bombing Germany because Britain was bombed first, and only two examples from two interviews mention that it was a bad thing to do and cite the cost of human life. This could well be a reflection of the fact that the

\textsuperscript{51} FG Grace Baines, GB, TM, 6.6.08, lines 343-347.
\textsuperscript{52} FG Jenny Smith, GB, AL, 22.4.07, lines 51-54.
dropping of the atomic bomb was carried out by the Americans and thus there is no need for a justification on behalf of their own nation from British interviewees. However, I would also argue that the fact that the suffering of British POWs of the Japanese is not highlighted in Britain removes the use of the atomic bomb as an act of vengeance. Only one participant, Nancy Walker, suggested that the dropping of the atomic bomb was a good thing to do in revenge for the treatment of British POWs, and as we have seen her opinions on the Japanese are heavily influenced by what happened to her friends in the Far East.

Summary

We have seen here how there is a great amount of sympathy for the Germans and position of Germany since the end of the Second World War. This includes the interviewees on occasions choosing to stress a number of mitigating circumstances for perceived crimes committed during World War II, in this way chapter seven links to our discussion on the Holocaust. The interviewees also make strong links between German and British national character, comments that the Germans were ‘just like us’ were not uncommon. Furthermore, a significant number also mentioned a specific German, Erwin Rommel, who they highlighted as holding in great esteem, and we discussed some areas of popular film and literature that mirrored these comments. Conversely, the Japanese are not afforded the same post-1945 rehabilitation. They are discussed by fewer participants than those who had opinions on the Germans but when they are it is often with negative reminiscences concerning the treatment of British POWs. There are no mitigating circumstances offered for the Japanese that were present in the narratives on Germans, such as that they were following orders. Instead the Japanese are more likely to be described in terms relating to an inherent evil or sadistic nature. However, despite
this the dropping of the atomic bomb was still acknowledged as a bad or last resort option by the vast majority of respondents rather than as a suitable act of revenge. Finally, I recount how, because of the focus of the Second World War being concerned with the Western European theatre post-1945, there is evidence that survivors of Japanese POW camps found discussing their experiences, even to family members, difficult. I would argue that on a theoretical basis for examining trauma we can link this to the situation of Holocaust survivors after World War II.
Conclusion

This study will not, nor was it intended to, create a singular, accepted definition of the theories that contribute to our understanding of collective memory. The discussion at the beginning of this thesis about the difficulties of producing a broadly acknowledged comprehension of the collective memory phenomenon in academia does not look likely to be solved soon, if truly ever. However, there is much for us to learn from this study both about ideas relating to collective memory and the more defined focus of this study, specifically about collective memory of the Second World War within England. Particularly it has shown the differing influences on collective memory of the Second World War and how people do not always use the national metanarrative to draw their knowledge of the past. Within this we have seen how family memory can exert considerable authority over individual memory, especially at times of great emotion. These emotional bonds to the family can supersede the myths of the British experience of World War II - the memory of the family group an individual belongs to overrides that of the nation. Furthermore, it has also been demonstrated how education and the media have influenced the narratives we have studied.

Throughout the thesis we have encountered narratives within generationa
memory that definitely support and strengthen the general work already conducted in the area. In this way the project has provided a mass of empirical narrative data for theories about the memory of the Second World War already covered by scholars. Indeed, out of the four chapters that make-up Part One of this report the titles were chosen (Defiance, Sacrifice, Unity and Nostalgia) because they were topics not only mentioned in the literature but because of their consistent reoccurrence in many of the interviews. However, what in-depth narrative interviews have given us here is a much
more exhaustive understanding of some personal nuances contained within these broader definitions of British collective memory of World War II. Using the generational approach we saw how memories could be passed on within the family through stories or ‘snippets’ about the past that were initiated by the first generation, sometimes at opportune moments such as discussing rationing during a family meal. Without wishing to provide an unnecessary synopsis of the thesis we have seen how defiance can both manifest itself as a fatalistic memory or as humorous stories; or how sacrifice can be seen in the striking lack of victimisation in many of the descriptions as well as the matter-of-fact way that the effect of hardships were conveyed; and how in discussing unity we discovered how people preferred not to exalt even heroic acts whilst giving exact examples of how people were always willing to help each other. In this way whilst this study is perhaps narrower in its focus than what has gone before on British memory of the Second World War, the qualitative research of peoples’ memories is much more detailed in the analysis of what was actually said to provide greater insight into areas where previous research has suggested much broader topics.

Furthermore, this study did not neglect to find new areas of inquest that should not be ignored by scholars in this field in the future. The smaller case study of some of the people of Coventry’s reaction to Churchill’s role in the bombing of the city provides a new inquiry into a localised expression of sacrifice. There is certainly the scope for numerous further localised case study projects that explore how the metanarratives of World War II memory are framed within smaller boundary limits than the nation state, such as cities. Furthermore, the extent of openness from those who acquired extra rations through sometimes dubious means, and the hints at the difficulties caused by evacuation, show that underlying the broad idea of a united Britain were frictions that have been exposed by this research into narrative description of the past. The move into
looking at the significance of computer games that represent actual historical events has led to new discussions of how people who actually remember the events depicted view their use compared to later generations.

In the second part of the thesis we looked at the more concrete topics of Holocaust, Allies and Enemies as these areas were more suitable to be discussed this way, as opposed to the more abstract ideas that went into creating the chapter headings in the first part. Here again, we found areas where the research added greater insights into work already conducted and theories already proposed. For instance, where scholars had noted that the Holocaust was of relatively little interest compared to other areas of World War II in Britain, this study provided narrative evidence that whilst a broad moral disgust was displayed by participants they could elaborate little further. Yet the generational approach also went further to show that as education had improved there was greater knowledge and thus more empathy for what had actually happened in later generations. However, this education could also have the effect of producing a narrow view of perpetrator motivation in the later generations; something that was also elaborated on during the discussion of how Germans were now viewed and the rehabilitation the nation experienced quite rapidly following the end of the war. An area here where this study has opened up new debate is conversely how the Japanese are viewed, especially by those who were close to someone, or who have knowledge of, the atrocities committed in Japanese POW camps. At writing we have recently witnessed the effects of the earthquake and tsunami of 11 March 2011 in Japan. It was interesting in the wake of this disaster to read Richard Littlejohn in the Daily Mail on 22 March comment how the grandfather of his wife, who was a POW of the Japanese during World War II, would not feel sympathy nor observe a minutes silence for the victims
because of Japanese conduct during the war towards British POWs. It further strengthens the findings of this study and it is hard to imagine any response like this being voiced against Germans should any type of similar tragedy befall that nation.

Although in this study we have seen how some existing theories about British memory of World War II have been reinforced we cannot ignore the instances where some interviewees’ private recollections differed so much from the public representations of the war. For instance, we saw in chapter one how although defiance was a general metanarrative to the British response, participants John Matthews and Beth Clark exhibited genuine fear and their memories showed signs of not being able to cope with their Blitz experience. Amongst other examples we also witnessed in chapter three how the Pole/ Rye family had vivid recollections of their family member’s dead body being looted during a bombing raid, clearly not emphasising the unity of the British people. Oral history allows us to examine and record these instances, to study memories that have been marginalised by the public memory of the period displayed at official commemorations and in films, books and newspapers. Yet, to refer directly to the example from the Pole/ Rye family a recent newspaper article in *The Observer* entitled ‘How spivs and crooks made their fortune from London’s darkest hour’, written by Duncan Campbell, examined looting during the Blitz in London. The article tackles some challenging issues for Britain’s war memory such as looters ‘yanking brooches and rings from the bodies of the revellers’ when the Café de Paris suffered a direct hit in 1941. However, the article cannot escape the limits of its discussion imposed upon it by the confines of British collective memory. Thus, at other points it downplays the extent of the looting by also emphasising that those who found property that did not

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2 D. Campbell, ‘How spivs and crooks made their fortune from London’s darkest hour’, in *The Observer*, 29.08.10, p.22.
belong to them simply took it because ‘somebody else would’ and, most importantly, leaves their readers with a quote from social historian Juliet Gardiner that she ‘still think[s] the British people did pull together’, thus reinforcing the existing narrative of unity.\(^3\)

This highlights the changing nature of myths and collective memory, and also that studies such as these should be seen in the context of the time they were conducted. It also offers us an interesting question from research such as this: when, if ever, do some of the more marginalised memories of an event become widely accepted by a community? The example above from *The Observer* suggests that even in trying to introduce a revision of how the Blitz is remembered in Britain, Campbell relies heavily on existing notions of representation to present his findings. I would argue that as World War II passes out of living memory there is an opportunity to explore some of the marginalised memories as we move away from an emotional attachment, to a period of time where it can be viewed with greater objectivity.

I suggest this because World War II is important for Britain, as was mentioned in the introduction it is part of how the British view themselves as a righteous nation, and also how British society draws security from its victorious role in the Second World War. Thus, as we have found in this study the more negative memories of World War II are found within individuals or families but do not reoccur in the national memory. This memory of the ‘good war’ has occluded the more negative elements from the public memory so it is remembered within a positive framework. As we saw in chapter four World War II is used as a reference point used to promote Britain becoming involved in more contemporary conflicts. It is also a frame of reference for when the nation was a world power and, in the context of decline on the world stage since 1945, a moment of

\(^3\) *Ibid.*
immense pride. Thus, it is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of memories used in this study were positive; chapter four even demonstrated the overall nostalgic view of the period from many of the participants. However, as the Second World War passes out of living memory the more marginalised elements, at present only a common discourse within academic circles, may enter public consciousness because the emotional bonds that create a level of social cohesion by collectively remembering the war in this way will begin to wane as first generation witnesses become less numerous.

This could also have implications for the representation of the Holocaust within Britain. The view of Britain as a righteous nation leaves little opportunity to survey the extent of the treatment of Jews within Britain and the response to the Holocaust during World War II within the public discourse. The research presented here highlights some of this disassociation, although the younger generations had a greater connection with the facts through education, there was overall little empathy for any suffering that occurred. Therefore, we can ask that if a more reflective representation of the Second World War occurs over the next twenty years will this also involve a more critical appraisal of British immigration policy and response to the news of genocide in Eastern Europe within the public domain, as it has been reassessed within academic circles over the last twenty years? It is definitely not a certainty that this will occur as we have also seen how participants were much more likely to empathise and show anger towards the treatment of British POWs by the Japanese. Therefore, we also have to consider the issue of how relevant a community feels any atrocity is to them when it is not, or has not been, conducted against them. Thus, it could also be argued that without an emotional attachment a re-examining of Britain’s attitude towards Jews and the Holocaust may not occur at all in the public domain. British memory of the Second
World War will continue to be interesting to observe as it passes out of living memory, providing the opportunity for comparative studies in later years.
Appendix 1-Pictures used in Group Discussions

1. From an exhibition on Wehrmacht crimes in Germany and Austria 1995-2004 depicting a Russian Prisoner of War, 1942.

2. From an exhibition on Wehrmacht crimes in Germany and Austria 1995-2004 depicting a mass grave in the Ukraine, 1941.
3. From an exhibition on war with the Soviet Union in Germany and shows Germans fleeing Berlin.

4. From an exhibition on war with the Soviet Union in Germany and depicts German Stukas taking off from a field in the USSR.
5. Shows a Nazi demonstration in a German town and the sign reads ‘Jews are our misfortune’.

6. Photograph of a British Royal Navy seaman on watch.
Appendix 2- ‘Prompt Sheet’

- Please tell me about your memories/ your relatives experiences during the Second World War.
- Major incidents to prompt recall:
  - Dunkirk
  - Battle of Britain
  - El Alamein
  - D-Day
  - Operation Market Garden
  - VE-Day
  - VJ-Day
- Home Front
  - Blitz
  - Rationing
  - Evacuation
  - Threat of invasion
- Chamberlain and Churchill
- Britain’s Allies
- Britain’s Enemies
- Holocaust
  - What know of the events
  - Impact on Britain/ Could Britain have done more
- What books/ films do you like about World War II
- Opinions on World War II computer games
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